とある魔術の禁書目録19
鎌池和馬
イラスト／灰村キヨタカ
電撃文庫

Toaru Majutsu no Index - Volume 19

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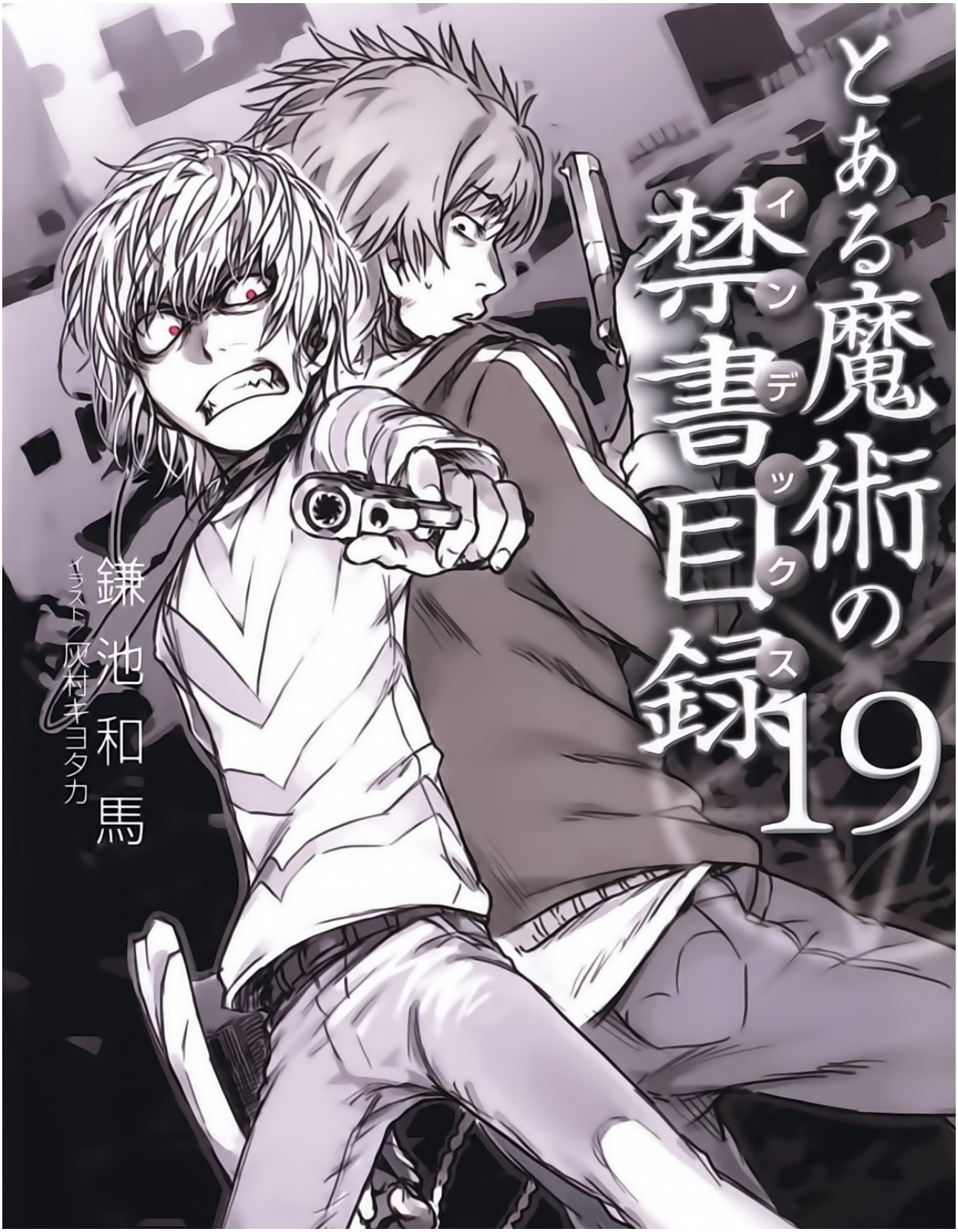
とある魔術の禁書目録（インデックス）19
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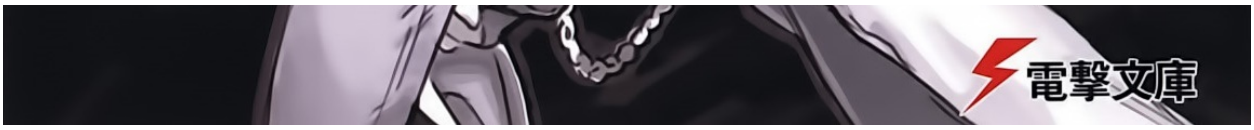
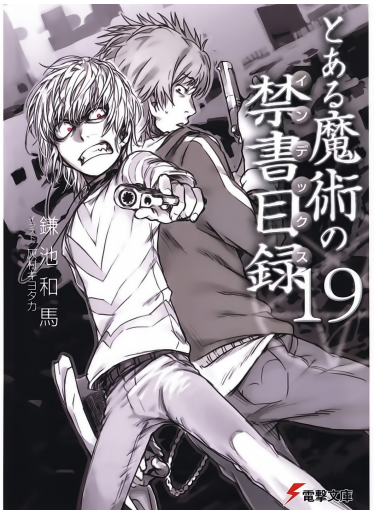


Toaru Majutsu no Index 19

"GROUP". As it implies, it's a group of people involved in dealing with incidents from the dark side of Academy City. Two members of the group — the strongest Level 5, Accelerator, and a man that's both an esper and a magician, Tsuchimikado Motoharu — teamed up to search about the mysterious keyword "Dragon". It is believed that the keyword is the only hope to bring down the 'shitty' status quo of the present.

On the other hand, there is someone who found their activities, conducted without any permission from the higher ups, a nuisance. That man would be a member of the highest authority in Academy City, the supervising Board of Directors. With his influence, he bares his fangs as a powerful obstacle to GROUP.

At the same time, the former members of "ITEM", Hamazura and Kinuhata, paid a visit to Takitsubo. Suddenly, Hamazura's "Doubt Of Extreme Bunny Girl Enthusiast" broke out. Hamazura then desperately explains the situation to Kinuhata and Takitsubo who were drawn away to another place, but...?! Continuing from Volume 15 and the SS series, the "Dark Side of Academy City" arc begins here!



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とある魔術の禁書目録(インデックス)⑲

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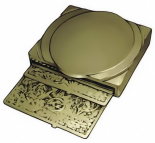


Kamachi Kazuma

This time around, I tried to break out of the strict exclusivity between 'bright, passionate stories' and 'dark, sad stories'. A dark, yet recklessly passionate main story. A bunch of obvious villains got thrown into humorous situations. It is a mix of attributes that might seem contradictory. Whether it is a great combination or not, please judge it by yourself.

(Products of Dengeki Bunko)

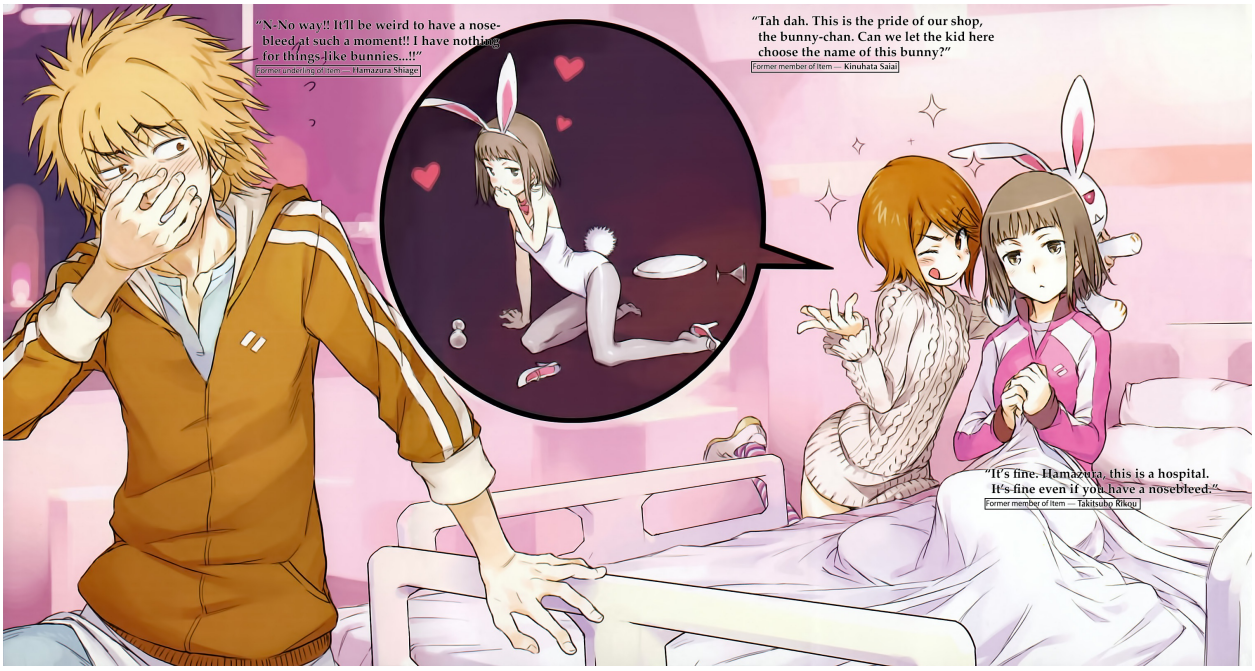
Toaru Majutsu no Index 1~19
Toaru Majutsu no Index SS 1 & 2
Heavy Object

Illustrator: Haimura Kiyotaka

Railgun's anime is currently on air right now, but the original work itself is still in a mess of a situation... If I ever have a chance, I'd like to make illustrations for the anime characters and put it here.

カバー／[illegible]

とある魔術の禁書目録
インデックス
19
鎌池和馬
イラスト／灰村キヨタカ
"Isn't it easier to just go shoot somewhere near the target, like 'BAM!'?"
Mercenary sniper who arrived from outside of Academy City — Stephanie Gorgeouspalace


"N-No way!! It'll be weird to have a nose-bleed at such a moment!! I have nothing for things like bunnies...!!"
Former member of Item — Hamazura Shiage
"Tah dah. This is the pride of our shop, the bunny-chan. Can we let the kid here choose the name of this bunny?"
Former member of Item — Kinuhata Saiai
"It's fine. Hamazura, this is a hospital. It's fine even if you have a nosebleed."
Former member of Item — Takitsubo Rikou

"Eh, it's nothing but simple case solving. Just... killing."
Member of Group — Tsuchimikado Motoharu
"Alright. So what's the job that needed everyone in Group?"
Member of Group — Unabara Mitsuki
"Hence, I wonder how fun it'll be to make someone fly?"
Member of Group — Musujime Awaki
"...You're an eyesore. Just limit yourself to finishing trivial matters quickly."
Member of Group — Accelerator

“Do you desire a showdown?”

Close associate of Shiokishi, member of the Board of Directors — **Sugitani**

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Prologue: The Uninteresting Exchanges Between Evil-doers. *Key_Shop.*

District 15 was Academy City's most prosperous area. In this District filled with TV stations and other media facilities, the land prices were the highest in all of Academy City.

Here was one building which was some sort of amalgamation between living apartments and company offices. This building was so extravagant one might as well buy a mansion along with the garden that comes with it and live there instead of here, it would be easier that way.

The #1 esper of Academy City, Accelerator, was currently at the top floor of this building.

Here was the place where a person called Depart lived, and it was also his working office. If one opened a restaurant here, disregarding how good the food was, just the view of the setting sun from the large windows would be enough to attract a fair amount of customers.

"You don't have to envy me, after all this place is only somewhere to hide in, not somewhere I can live peacefully. This kind of house where I have to abandon it if someone comes to investigate, how could I possibly live here calmly?" The master of this place—a man who looked liked a university student, said that while shrugging, seated on a chair.

He didn't look at all cautious about his surroundings.

It was the same even when face-to-face with a white-haired, red-eyed, esper holding a crutch with one arm but still giving off the feeling that 'even if I'm disabled I can still beat you to a pulp', Accelerator.

He was probably used to something like this.

All it took was some thought on what Depart dealt in, and it would become obvious that none of those that made business deals with him were small fries.

“I’m not interested in hearing what’s going on. All you need to do is like placing an order for food at a restaurant, and say just what it is you need.”

Facing the still wordless Accelerator, Depart showed no sign of tension.

“So what are you looking for? Vehicles for escaping? Keys to a safehouse? Or is it an ‘exchange’? For money laundering it is 1:0.8 right now, it was 1:0.75 a while back, so doing it now would be more valuable. Your appearance is too eye-catching, do you need me to introduce you somewhere with make-up or surgery to change your looks?”

As if promoting items on a menu, everything mentioned were necessities for running or lying low. Academy City was a city walled off from the rest of the world; it was exceedingly difficult to prevent being found with methods that relied on running away. So, things like preparing safehouses, or hiding your identity to smuggle onto supply trains to leave Academy City (of course, even the chances of success are still low).

Hearing that, Accelerator remained silent for a moment.

Then, he slowly looked around the spacious room.

“Safehouses… huh? Since this is one of those safehouses, does that mean this is a sample of what they are like?”

“Yep~ no matter what these are my main merchandises. I started my business dealing in safehouses. So, I have confidence in the quality of what I’m offering, and I still focus on this part of my business. From first rate mansions to caravans parked in the mountains of District 21, I have the keys to all of them. Do you want to have a look at the photos?”

The explanations came to a close, but Accelerator didn’t reply.

He only looked at the corner of the room. There the large windows that showed the outside view also reflected something that was obscured by the furniture. Something like a sandbag was hung up over there.

“Is ‘that’ also merchandise?”

“Hm? So you’re interested in that? Unfortunately, that’s not an option. That’s only my personal hobby.”

Depart turned to look, and when he saw that was hung up on chains his expression was a bit awkward. It was an expression like ‘when a friend found out you have an unexpected hobby’.

There was a girl around 15 years old.

She had only some underwear covering her pure white skin, and handcuffs chained her hands up as she hung there in mid-air.

She was not moving at all.

The girl had bruises all over her body and didn’t even have the strength to cover herself in shame. She could only hang there weakly, swaying slightly. The breathing sounds it showed she was at least still alive, though her eyes were lifeless.

Accelerator looked at the girl and then said,

“What a distasteful hobby. It’s pretty expensive right?”

“It’s so-so. Oi, wait. Don’t break it. Even if this place is a one-time hideout, it’s still a pain to clean up corpses. Even not taking into account disposing the corpse, she’s still really expensive! If you broke her you’d owe me at least 7 million.”

“And you still beat her up to this point. It doesn’t look like her purpose is for whoring.”

“That’s why I said this is only a personal hobby. She’s only here as a punching bag. She’s nowhere near the standard for something like that. Or are you into pettankos? That’s hard to believe.”[1]

At this time, Accelerator took an envelope out from the bag in his hand that was not holding the crutch, and placed it lightly onto Depart's table. From the opened

end of the envelope ten bundles of cash dropped out, each had 1 million tied up.

Seeing these, Depart could only give a wry smile.

“Oi oi.”

“This is a prepayment. I’ve been given a boring job, and I’m fuming right now. I can’t guarantee that I won't slip up and end up killing someone.”

“Alright. I’ll say this first, the life is 7 million. Paying for disposing the corpse is not included.” Depart’s voice had a slight undertone of regret. He said it was something like a hobby to begin with, but he still gave it up like so. He was probably thinking all he had to do was buy a new one.

“I’m curious, why are you interested in that brat? Are you saying you are the kind of guy that can only be excited by something that’s abused thoroughly by another man?”

“Hmm? Oh I see, you misunderstood me.”

Facing Depart, Accelerator lightly denied his question.

“I’m not buying the girl that’s hanging there.”

“?”

“It’s you.”

Depart didn’t understand Accelerator’s reply for a moment.

Kacha.

Then he heard his nose being shattered.

“What, are, you doing—Aaaaaaaaaargh?!”

A piercing pain accompanied the howl. Depart fell down from his chair and onto the ground. At the same time, a small bag landed next to him. Even though he knew intellectually that Accelerator had thrown that at his face, he couldn’t understand no matter what.

It was unimaginable that someone who relied on a crutch could throw something that hard with one hand. The pain was like being hit by one of those automatic ball pitching machines right on the face.

“Fu-Fuck…! What the fuck do you think you’re doing!”

Opening the drawers of the expensive looking office table, Depart pulled out a pistol. Though even with a gun pointed at him, Accelerator didn’t think much of the situation. His hand that had been holding a bag was now on the choker-style electrode around his neck, and his face had a sinister evil smile on it.

Then, he said while smiling:

“By your standards… a person is worth about 7 million right?”

“… Eh?!”

No way?! Depart’s lips started to tremble.

As if to confirm his worst case assumption, Accelerator continued to say,

“Seriously, that bastard on the other side of the phone only gives me these kinds of boring jobs. I’m fuming right now, and I’ve paid already—there’s no problem in slaughtering you now, right?”

Being assaulted by an overwhelming fear that couldn’t be seen, Depart pulled the trigger while trembling.

The sound of flesh being torn apart and roars that was past the limits of what could be called a shriek exploded out simultaneously.

Five minutes later.

Accelerator kicked a piece of flesh with the tip of his shoes, and turned off his electrode with a bored expression. He was completely unhurt. As long as his ability was active, he could reflect any attack.

He held on to his crutch with one hand and pulled out a cell phone with another. He input a number and brought the phone to his ears.

“It’s finally over. This shitty job is too fucking boring. Huh? What is needed right now? That’s right, a recovery crew to tidy up this piece of trash that makes me sick just smelling what’s left of him. Also,”

At this point, Accelerator paused slightly.

He looked at the girl still hanging there, and turned on his electrode once more.

All he did was move his fingers slightly, and the chains binding the girl were cut off inexplicably.

“… Also, a set of woman’s clothing. The size? No idea, just bring a random set that’s wearable. There’s no use asking you classless grunts for specifics. And send only women as part of the recovery crew. If there’s a single male in the team I’ll kick his fucking balls apart.”

After ordering what he needed, he hung up the phone. Then he grabbed the bundles of cash on the table and threw it towards the girl that fell to the ground.

Accelerator turned off his electrode, and didn’t bother to turn and look at the girl. He moved towards the exit relying on his crutch, and said in an indifferent tone while doing so,

“Live freely from now on. For the rest of your life, whether it is a success or failure is up to your own efforts.”

“…”

The girl that showed no reaction up to this point finally moved her neck slowly towards Accelerator’s silhouette. Her lips were trembling and, as if talking to herself, she asked with effort,

“You are…?”

“A villain.”

Accelerator pushed the doors apart, and answered in a song-like voice.

“A villain that’s no better than a piece of shit.”

This was his, or rather their daily life.

Accelerator, Tsuchimikado Motoharu, Unabara Mitsuki, and Musujime Awaki.

These four people were called Group, and to this day they were dispelling the dark clouds of this city.

Notes

1. ↑ Pettanko = Flat chest

Chapter 1: Goodwill shall be trusted for now.
Dark_Hero.

Part 1

The time was 6 PM, October 17th.

In one of the hotel rooms used as a hideout, Accelerator sat on the floor next to a window. His back was against the wall and in front of him were many pieces of machinery placed on spread out newspaper.

This work couldn’t be done on a bed.

Accelerator continued to work on as he craned his neck to hold a cell phone to his ear.

A small girl’s voice came from the other side of the cell phone.

“Oh right, tonight’s dinner seems to be hamburger casseroles, says Misaka as Misaka reports her findings from her scouting.”

“Is that so. Guess that idiot Yomikawa finally tried to make that with her electric rice cooker.”

The piece of machinery laid out on the newspaper was a crutch.

It was designed to be half connected to a person’s right forearm, with a stylish design that made it look like a police baton. It was ‘machinery’ because it had been modified with components like a small motor and weight distribution sensors.

Accelerator touched the crutch, which had four legs attached to its end like a

microphone stand.

“…It’s finally complete, though I wonder if the weight distribution sensor is enough to determine the center of gravity. Should I add a compass that adjusts the angles as well?”

He did the appropriate analyses in his mind while talking on the phone. He was talking to someone called Last Order, a girl who looked only ten years old.

“If necessary Misaka will go negotiate with her and ask to make your share, says Misaka as Misaka looks towards the kitchen.”

“That’s good. That way if you send it by refrigerated boxed mail it won’t go bad.”

He put his right hand through the ring on the crutch and grasped the handle, and the four legs started to move like an insect’s. Still sitting on the ground, he casually knocked the floor with the crutch, but even with the staff parallel to the floor the mechanical legs were able to hold onto the floor and get him up.

(It’s good enough, I guess.)

“You said we’ll definitely be able to see each other this weekend right? says Misaka as Misaka affirms.”

“…If everything goes along with the schedule, then yes.”

He manipulated the handle once more, and with a *kacha* the crutch shortened itself, just like a police baton. Accelerator tried to move his wrist to confirm its senses, hidden inside the sheath that covered everything below his elbow.

(Mah, guess this will do. I can’t walk without a crutch, but activating my ability will make this thing useless.)

Accelerator arbitrarily showed his thoughts. He reached out with his crutch, and with another *kacha* the four-legged staff extended swiftly and knocked away the various tools on the newspaper.

(…If I add a bit more power to this I might be able to use this as a weapon… But that would be meaningless. When I have my ability activated I don’t need any

other weapons, and if I don’t have my ability activated when I lift this up I’ll fall over.)

“Misaka will now report that she’s really looking forward to next Saturday—Uwoooh! Yomikawa is bringing the hamburger casserole over now!! says Misaka as Misaka reports the higher priority issue!”

“Really? You’re really living a good life right now, aren’t you?”

The phone beside the bed began ringing in a tone completely different from that of a cell phone. Accelerator involuntarily looked over at it. As he was about to pick up it abruptly stopped. This happened three times in succession. It was a signal.

It was probably from the limo parked close to this hotel.

“What’s going on? says Misaka as Misaka asks about the telephone ringing with her head tilted.”

“…It’s nothing. That was just the room service checking,” Accelerator casually replied.

He put his weight on the crutch and slowly got up. Once again he felt the weight of his small pistol he had tucked away behind him, stowed between his belt and his pants.

At this time, Last Order suddenly asked,

“Is everything alright?”

She didn’t know the details of Accelerator’s work, but even without knowing anything she still worried about him.

“Don’t go doing anything dangerous! says Misaka as Misaka tries asking.”

“Who do you think I am?”

He talked into the phone as if to reject her kindness.

“For a bastard that can survive even a nuclear strike, there’s nothing to worry

about.”

Accelerator disconnected the call and put the phone back into his pocket.

Then he walked out of the room without looking back.

Though there were newspapers and tools all over the room, there would probably be some grunts from who-knew where coming to clean everything up later.

Tsuchimikado Motoharu was strolling on District 7’s prosperous roads on the way back home from school. He had blond hair, and was wearing sunglasses and a Hawaiian shirt underneath his school uniform. Even though he was wearing an outfit that stood out so much, there were still a few people here and there that stood out even more.

Such as the maids that were handing out flyers in front of one of the shops.

Tsuchimikado's eyes behind his sunglasses squinted involuntarily as he walked past.

“…Well now, the times are getting better and better nyaa…”

As soon as he said that, a fierce straight punch smashed right into the center of the back of Tsuchimikado’s tall figure. It came from his sister, Tsuchimikado Maika. And the girl who had caused that was for some reason sitting on top of a steel can-shaped robot.

This girl who made her not-blood-related older brother bend over in pain hadn’t done it out of jealousy.

“…Those can’t possibly be called professional maids. They’re mixing up maids, waitresses and receptionists! Hah? Or are you saying that anything that has laces on them is good enough?”

Tsuchimikado Maika, whose large front forehead was showing through her short hair, had a cross-popping vein clearly apparent there as she interrogated

Motoharu in a low voice. Looking closely, her clothing was actually a dark blue maid uniform with a long skirt. Different from the girls handing out flyers, her own clothing may have been plain, but it was much more practical.

“M-Maika. That kind of black aura has an ‘intense’ pressure on my liver, you know?”

“What I’m saying is that, though spreading the glory of maids to the world is important, a wrong method of doing it would only be troublesome. There are always people that look at this outfit with lewd eyes.”

“L-lewd eyes?!”

Faced with his not-blood-related sister’s accusation, Tsuchimikado’s reaction was over-the-top.

However, his mind wasn’t thinking of things like ‘I’ll never forgive any bastard that dares have that kind of look directed at my own sister’.

“I-isn’t that alright? …After all, if a maid isn’t sexy there’s no point in its existence right!?”

“…Guess I have to teach this no-good onii-san of mine just what a professional maid is.”

“Oww! Does this mean I get to experience the professional maid skills from my not blood-related sister with my own body?!” Tsuchimikado was yelling inappropriate words like that while being beaten up by his own sister’s small fists.

At this time, a car came by them blared its horns. It might have looked like someone trying to make a slow moving car in front of them move faster, but that was not the case.

It was a signal.

The limo that flashed its lights and was currently turning the corner was probably there to pick up Tsuchimikado.

However, Tsuchimikado didn’t even look at the direction the limo disappeared

off to and instead moved towards a corner store.

“Nyaa~ I have to go buy some automatic pencil lead.”

“Hmm? I’ll come along with you.”

“Ooh! You’ll help? Actually, I have a loo-oot of homework today nyaa. I don’t know if even two people can finish all that. Maika’s a scholarship student right? So you’ll be able to help me finish half of them, and if we siblings work together we might be able to finish them all by morning.”

“…I won’t be going to onii-san’s room tonight… making a middle-school student help with high school homework, just how much are you trying to push onto me, huh? There are still leftovers from earlier so you won’t starve to death. So that’s that, bye~”

Maika, who was sitting on top of a cleaning robot tapped on its side. It could have been the sensor noticing that, but either way the cleaning robot changed direction as if it was being remote controlled by someone else.

You cold hearted person!! A shocked Tsuchimikado in front of the corner store held his head down in depression for quite a while before going inside to buy the pencil lead, and as he came out, he turned into the side road where the limo had gone.

After opening the doors to the limo he found someone else already there. The white-haired Level 5 esper was lying on a makeshift bed with a disgruntled expression.

Looking at that Level 5 esper, Tsuchimikado asked,

“…So, what’s our work today?”

Musujime Awaki was currently in District 10. In this district, which was mainly filled with nuclear & bacteriology research centers and disposal facilities for experimental animals, there was one more famous facility.

The Reformatory.

Normally, this wasn't a place where a girl in the uniform of the prestigious esper development school—Kirigaoka Girl’s Academy—would come. But something that couldn’t be helped was that her "comrades" were imprisoned here.

Comrades here meant other people that had wanted to complete a grand plan together with her.

At the same time, it meant that this ‘plan’ was a criminal activity.

Due to a combination of a Level 4 and a Level 5 that had strength above even that of ojou-samas from the Kirigaoka Academy, their plan failed. Many ‘comrades’ were overwhelmingly defeated and shut away into that correction facility. Only Musujime was spared—even though as the mastermind of the plan she should have been the first one to be shut away.

But there were rules unknown to most of the world.

So Musujime Awaki was forced to use her powerful Move Point to fight in the darkness of Academy City.

By doing that, her ‘comrades’ would receive protection both physical and social. On the other hand, if she did not agree then there would be no guarantees.

One day, they must escape from this city.

They had to emerge victorious in this game that they had no chances of winning.

No matter what, her ‘comrades’ must be freed.

This was Musujime Awaki’s only goal. No, a better way of saying that should be it was the only thing left for her. Even the resolute will to complete their grand plan, disregarding the rules, had now been grinded down and was no more. There was no more reason to take the initiative, and for the Musujime Awaki right now no matter where she went she could only react to the situation around her.

Even if it was like this it didn’t matter; she constantly thought that.

To a degree, she was moving to this City’s will.

However, even if she made the higher ups of Academy City collapse completely, the current situation wasn't guaranteed to change. And if things ever got to that point, she could only hate the one that had brought her into that position—herself. Thinking of that, Musujime kept walking on the darkening road under the sunset.

At this time,

From her pockets in her skirt came a ring tone of a cell phone. Originally she had no interest in things like these, and only a few days ago her ringtone had still been the default one. After the person she lived with right now had changed it to a ‘recommended tone’, she hadn't bothered changing it, so it ended with this current tune.

Musujime sighed lightly and took out her cell phone from her pocket.

After hitting the ‘answer call’ button and putting the phone next to her ear, she heard the familiar voice of the person that was currently living with her.

"Musujime-chan?! Where are you wandering about right now?”

A voice that was sickeningly sweet, and sounded like a girl that had yet to reach puberty.

The person that she lived with now was called Tsukuyomi Komoe.

What was frightening was that she was apparently a high school teacher.

“Today, because I’m letting Musujime-chan learn how to cook, Sensei is waiting on an empty stomach! Come back and challenge your skills, it won’t be good if Musujime-chan doesn’t learn at least one or two dishes that she can cook easily.”

At first hearing, this seemed only like the person she lived with wanted her to come back and cook for them. But Musujime quickly realized that wasn’t the goal of the teacher that had a sickening sweet voice.

The evidence was as follows:

“I’m not saying that girls have to know how to cook, but life is long and the more you learn the wider the path will be. This isn’t just about making meals. Though Sensei hasn't asked about what Musujime-chan wants to do from now on, for Musujime-chan to not feel troubled when the time comes Sensei still feels it is best to discuss this with you. Though I say that, this is all under the absolute premise that I don’t take up your personal time or getting in the way of your own decisions.”

After hearing that, Musujime stopped her steps involuntarily. Standing in the gloomy District 10, she abruptly realized the pressure that was slowly building up inside of her heart was disappearing bit by bit.

This probably wasn’t just on the surface, deep down Musujime Awaki was astounded at something.

Even for a person like her, she wanted someone to say those kinds of things to her.

“…”

Just as Musujime was thinking how to answer a limo came past her. It stopped next to a vending machine that sold juice, and a man came out of the driver’s seat and headed straight towards the vending machine.

Though these two never exchanged a glance, the signal was clearly given.

A signal for work.

(She’ll definitely be mad. No, she’ll definitely be mad *for* me.) Musujime thought that as she said into her phone,

“…I’ll come right out and say it, I have something urgent to do right now, so guess cooking is not possible tonight.”

“Eeh?! Something came up today as well? Then what about Sensei who’s waiting for you to cook? Actually, Sensei was afraid you would mess up a lot so I went out and bought a ton of vegetables, and the fridge is stuffed full!”

“That’s good right? A vegetarian will live longer you know.”

After replying in a casual manner Musujime turned off her phone.

For a short time, Musujime stared at her phone, and then put it into her skirt's pockets. After that, she walked towards the limo, and after opening the door, she found an esper lying on the makeshift bed, and next to a table, a blond boy with sunglasses was playing a game where maids in miniskirts wielding laser cannons blasted at things.

Looking annoyed at the other passengers in the limo, Musujime said,

“…Come to think of it, limos have a kitchen in them right?”

Unabara Mitsuki was currently in a hospital in District 7.

Though it was past six in the afternoon, due to hospital policy, visitors were allowed to stay until very late. That time was about to come up.

He was inside a single-person use hospital room.

Having said that, he was not the one that had to be treated.

Unabara Mitsuki came to visit another girl who had to stay in this hospital.

“…Same as usual you’re really attached to that face, Etzali.”

The brown-skinned girl who was sitting up on the bed said with her voice deliberately lowered. With shoulder-length black curly hair, the impression she gave people was vastly different from that of a Japanese person. Her name was Xochitl, and she was from central America.

“And you’re still the same with your unhappy face. Are the artificial fibers of the clothing uncomfortable for you?”

As he said that Unabara placed a large package onto the bedside table.

“Here’s the traditional clothes of the Aztec culture. It took me a lot of work to get my hands on this… but going around the hospital wearing this will make you

stand out, so please just wear this after lights out."

"Should I thank you on bent knees?"

"You've been like this for a while now, just what is wrong with you?"

"Guess you won't understand if I don't say it plainly, I'll make myself clear."

Xochitl turned her head around and stared right at Unabara,

"It makes me sick just seeing you talking and smiling like an unrelated civilian."

"?"

"The 'original' of the grimoire… you took it right?"

Xochitl's sight turned back towards her own hand.

Her five fingers opened then clenched themselves, slowly.

"Now over two-thirds of my body is made of artificial parts. …So how did it go? You managed to perfectly take the grimoire from me while I was unconscious. Once again you made me see your skills and magnanimity as a magician."

Once, Xochitl had tried to use a powerful 'original' grimoire as a weapon, and over two-thirds of her body had been ground down by some magic cabal for the base of that grimoire. And the one who had saved her behind the scenes was Unabara.

Xochitl moved her sight from her hand and onto Unabara.

"…The original is in your possession right now, isn't it?"

"It's right here."

Unabara lifted open his suit using one hand.

In it was something that looked like a holster from a gangster film, and a rolled up scroll made of animal skin was placed in it. Before Xochitl had a clear look Unabara covered it back up with his suit.

“That was something that I couldn’t even control when I broke my body apart trying, and you managed to control it just like that.”

“Hardly. Really, just restraining this thing is taking up all my power.”

Though his tone of voice was fairly laid-back, Unabara understood just how horrifying this grimoire was.

Then, for Xochitl that had to become the raw ingredient to be able to control this piece called ‘original grimoires’, just what kind of chaotic situation had she gotten herself into?

“What happened?”

Unabara asked.

This was the question he had wanted to ask ever since they had met once again. He only asked it now after Xochitl had finally recovered to a certain point.

Xochitl went silent for a moment, then turned around and looked at Unabara with only her brown face showing. She then said slowly,

“You probably already know about that battle with the ‘Liberal Arts City’. The one where we fought with that American research facility.”

“Yeah, I know the details. I’ve heard the official statement is that it was a terrorist attack from insurgents that got their hands on cheap arms.”

“Of course, the truth is that we started a magic attack on them.”

At this point, Xochitl went silent once more.

The largest magic cabal of the American continent fought head on seriously against those that called themselves the ‘World Police’. For someone like her she should have just been in a support role behind the frontlines.

“Something went wrong.”

Xochitl’s tone was just like giving a boring report.

“In that instant before the battle was concluded, I disobeyed some of the orders

slightly. As the price for my disobedience my body has been modified somewhat. As there were previous cases done by the cabal, this isn't something ridiculous."

There were no such rules. Unabara himself was an old hand in the cabal, and no matter how severe the crime was he had never heard of the preposterous punishment of having the body ground down and merged with an original grimoire.

"Didn't anyone try to stop this? What about Tochtli? Isn't she your comrade?"

Even though he already knew the outcome, Unabara's mouth still spoke the name of another girl, the name of Xochitl's colleague.

But Xochitl only shook her head.

"After merging with the grimoire I haven't seen Tochtli. Before having the grimoire taken off me I was only a weapon. The one in charge of battle operations, Tecpatl, should know where she is. But that hateful man just wouldn't let me see her."

Then, Xochitl directed her sight onto where Unabara kept the grimoire.

"Having said that, disregarding the affinity of the magician, just the thought of using the grimoire as you wish is something that's very difficult, considering the human structure. Even having done so much I was still under the control of the grimoire's will."

"…My thoughts exactly. Things such as 'grimoires' aren't meant to be used as trump cards. Using things like these where their own powers are not fully understood when in a team will only lead to destruction… Group, where I belong to right now, if anyone tried something like that they would be probably be piled, beaten and killed off that way by everyone else."

At this point, Xochitl, for some reason, went silent again.

"…Teamwork, huh."

"?"

“It’s nothing. When you speak of ‘comrades’ now, the first thing that pops up in your mind is definitely those guys that I don’t know of right?”

“Xochitl…”

“Don’t deny it.”

The dark-skinned girl blocked Unabara’s mouth with a tall wall of words.

“No matter what the reason, it’s true you defected to Academy City and worked willingly for them in the darkness as a pawn. This means you betrayed your original ‘comrades’ and defeated me. Isn’t that wonderful ‘teamwork’?”

Admitting her defeat but at the same time rubbing salt into Unabara’s wounds, Xochitl saw Unabara’s stiff expression and finally showed a satisfied expression. But a gloomy trace accompanied that expression.

“Isn’t that right,”

At this point, Xochitl averted her eyes slightly away from Unabara’s own.

As she pouted she used a voice that was just on the edge of hearing and continued,

“…Etzali onii-chan.”

Time stopped at this moment.

Before Unabara could even react to her words the door to their room was pushed open roughly with a loud thud.

The one that charged in was a blond boy with sunglasses, Tsuchimikado Motoharu.

“Unabara, you bastard! What the hell were you on about right then nyaa?!”

“Move, Etzali!! It must be pursuers from the ‘organisation’!! Damn it, has it been decided that I am someone to be eliminated as well now?!”

'No, this guy may be a pervert but he’s on our side.' Before Unabara could even explain using that sentence, Tsuchimikado rushed up to him with a cross-popping vein visible on his head.

“Unabara…!!! You bastard, you already had a chick already back home, yet you dare to come to Academy City and try to pick up girls from Tokiwadai Middle School?!”

“No, ara, what are you on about?”

Not good. Unabara shook with a fright and his body started to tremble involuntarily.

Xochitl, who was still on guard against Tsuchimikado, froze after hearing that and then turned towards Unabara.

“…Middle-school girls? Don’t tell me you betrayed the ‘organisation’ for a reason like that.”

Unabara, who couldn’t deny that, sweated bullets as he averted his gaze from Xochitl. And it was not because the other party was a middle school student that was giving him trouble. It didn’t matter if the other party was a high school student or a university student, he was not some kind of lolicon.

“That’s not it, the ‘sibling’ relationship here is just something like a sempai-kouhai one in the cabal!!”

“In other words it’s a not blood-related one? Isn’t that every man’s ultimate dream nyaa?!!”

From outside the hospital room, Musujime Awaki looked stealthily at Unabara and Tsuchimikado whose argument was getting out of hand.

This trip was clearly to come here to get more people for the job, but now she was started to think it might better to go and do this by herself.

Musujime said to Accelerator, who was leaning against the wall near her,

“Brothers or sisters, these things are getting chaotic. Seriously, we’re about to go onto the battlefield, can’t they consider how we feel right now?”

But Accelerator didn’t respond to her.

Musujime looked at him in a surprised manner, then noticed Accelerator’s lips were moving slightly.

After listening closely,

“(…Being dragged around by brats younger than you, everyone came through that way. No matter how ridiculous this is I don’t have a right to interfere with this stuff.)”

“Sheesh, am I the only person in this Group that isn’t a pervert?”

As soon as that was said, Accelerator, Tsuchimikado Motoharu and Unabara Mitsuki instantly directed their sight on the one that spoke—Musujime Awaki.

As one, completely as one, they said in a tone as if it was only natural,

“This exhibitionist shotacon girl actually sees us as perverts.” “Yeah nyaa.” “You’re right.”

“Whaaa?! *cough cough cough cough* Wh-wh-wh-what do you people have as proof to say others are a shotacon?!!”

Faced with this onee-sama-like and huge-chested high school student girl, all three indicated it would take too long to explain while shaking their heads. As if saying they had known all along but only hadn’t mentioned it for the sake of politeness.

Xochitl was extremely unhappy at their surprisingly singular response, but Unabara didn’t notice that detail.

After saying farewell to the pouting dark-skinned girl, Unabara left the hospital room.

“Alright. So what’s the job that needed everyone in Group?”

“Just solving some of the usual things.”

Tsuchimikado answered while whistling leisurely.

“Butcher all of those terrorists that took some hostages and refuse to surrender.”

Part 2

Meanwhile, a boy and a girl approached a shop within the same hospital. The shop mainly sold snacks and drinks, but it also had a lineup of books to fight the boredom and water guns that made one wonder where in the hospital they could be used.

The girl looked around the shop with quick movements of her head and the boy watched her from behind.

The boy’s name was Hamazura Shiage.

He had brown hair and wore an unfashionable jacket and jeans. He had the face of a dumb thug, but he was a dumb thug, so it couldn’t really be helped. He was the delinquent who had defeated Academy City’s #4 Level 5, Mugino Shizuri.

The girl’s name was Kinuhata Saiai.

She was about 12 years old and also had brown hair, but hers was much silkier. Her hair was in a bob that didn’t quite go down to her shoulders. She wore a short wool dress that looked something like a sweater that left her white thighs bare to a dangerous-looking level. She was the kind of girl that would make a train ride awkward if she sat across from you.

Kinuhata looked at the types of flowers that were placed directly on the floor of the shop.

“You’re visiting her in the hospital, so how could you super forget to bring flowers, Hamazura? I guess it’s super okay to think of you as super Hamazura-y.”

“Hey, don’t bend over while looking at them like that. Your ass is going to be visible from behind.”

“Isn’t it super amazing that you can’t see it even when I’m in this pose? This angle is super different from your everyday bitch.”

(Dammit, she has it all calculated out!!) Hamazura cursed in his heart.

Kinuhata thought carefully for a bit and then called the clerk over having chosen a flower that Hamazura didn’t know the name of. Of course, it was Hamazura’s job to carry the bouquet of flowers.

Kinuhata spoke as they walked towards the elevator that led to the general ward.

“Now that the bouquet has been super taken care of, do you have anything else for her super prepared?”

“Yeah. Although Takitsubo will probably be released from the hospital before too long, so it isn’t some toy that will get her too excited.”

“Please super give up on the idea of a bunny suit.”

“What kind of person do you think I am?”

“A super pervert that super loves bunny girls.”

As they argued back and forth, Hamazura and Kinuhata got on the elevator and headed for their destination floor. They walked down the corridor and knocked on the hospital room’s door. A familiar voice responded.

When they opened the door, they found Hamazura’s war buddy who had once survived a fierce battle.

She was Takitsubo Rikou.

Hamazura recalled that the girl always looked tired. Her black hair was cut

evenly at shoulder length. She normally wore a pink track suit, but it seemed to also function as casual wear and sleepwear for her. As she sat up in the bed, she was wearing the same outfit as usual.

“How are you super feeling?” Kinuhata readily asked as she took apart the bouquet and transferred the flowers into a vase, but she said it in a way that seemed to say she already knew Takitsubo was improving.

In fact, Takitsubo herself did not seem to think about it too deeply.

“It looks like I’ll be fine without doing anything more about it. I’m being released tonight and have already started preparing to leave.”

“What!? Why didn’t you tell us that sooner!?”

“We bought you some gifts, but I guess they’re kinda super in the way.”

“I’m sorry. I’ll make sure to take your gifts home with me,” Takitsubo said bowing her head in response to Kinuhata’s unnecessary remark.

Hamazura struck Kinuhata on the top of the head like she had answered wrong in a quiz show.

“That’s not what I meant. I wish she had told us sooner, so we could prepare a party to celebrate.”

“…Hamazura, I’m gonna super hit you back later.”

“That doesn’t change my opinion on this!!” Hamazura yelled. (But only in his heart.)

Of course, Kinuhata was completely oblivious to his internal yell.

“But I was pretty worried when I heard you had super collapsed from using too much Body Crystal. Unlike with a cold or something, I don’t really know what this is, so I super couldn’t imagine it. At any rate, I’m super happy you’re being released from the hospital.”

Hamazura agreed with that.

“That’s right. You can’t use your powers that used the Body Crystal, but I’m just relieved nothing worse happened. …Oh, right, right. You might not need it since you’re leaving, but I got you something to kill some time with. It’s a jigsaw puzzle.”

“So it wasn’t a super bunny suit…”

“The way you’re staring at me all wide-eyed makes me really want to make you cry. You don’t mind, right?”

“Hamazura, with your pitiful technique, that’s something that will always be super impossible for you to do. Oh, right. I super brought this. Tah-dah. It’s a super stuffed bunny!!”

After that announcement, Kinuhata pulled a 50 cm stuffed animal from a box (that Hamazura had carried). Overall, it was fancy and fluffy, but for some reason it had what looked like human hair stretching down from its mouth that made one wonder what it had just eaten.

Hamazura was a bit worried about how Takitsubo would take such a surreal mascot, but…

“How cute.”

“What!? I was sure you would say something like ‘it has no practical use’!! Is this a discrepancy in your personality that only exists in the strong bonds between the main former members of Item!?”

“The way you get all wide-eyed and start super trembling makes me want to make you cry every single day. You don’t mind, right? I’m gonna make you super cry.”

“Heh heh heh. With your pitiful body, that’s something that will—Dgah gah gah gah gah!? Stop that, you idiot! Stop digging your thumb into the back of my leg… Gwah! That fucking hurts. Okay, okay. I’ll cry, I’ll cry!!”

After Hamazura had been taken to the ground yelling “I give! I give!” due to that strange wrestling technique, his attacker, Kinuhata, wiped the sweat from her brow.

“For the bunny girl-crazy super pervert Hamazura, giving any sign that you are losing your respect and fear for us is a crime. Is that super clear?”

“…From a sheltered and domineering rich girl, that line might do something for me, but from a girl with huge amounts of superhuman strength who has done all sorts of jobs in the shadowy parts of the city, it can’t be passed off as a joke. And by the way, I don’t especially like bunny girls.”

“Oh?” said Kinuhata as she grabbed the stuffed rabbit Takitsubo had been embracing.

She moved it behind Takitsubo and placed it so Takitsubo’s head lined up with it.

Doing so made the stuffed animal’s ears the only thing visible from behind Takitsubo’s expressionless face. Kinuhata, who had created the situation, added a finishing blow with her words.

“Tah dah. This bunny is the pride of the establishment. She’s Rikou-chan, the type that will die of loneliness if left alone after falling in love with someone. Is she the bunny you want?”

Immediately afterwards, something came flowing down from Hamazura Shiage’s nose.

He put his hand up to his face without thinking and then looked down in shock to see that it wasn’t a runny nose, but he had a more pressing problem now. When he looked up, both Kinuhata Saiai, who had carried out the joke, and Takitsubo Rikou, who had been used in the joke, were drawing back from him.

“…Hamazura…you love bunnies that super much…?”

“N-no!! There’s something odd about getting a bloody nose at a time like this!! There has to be some other reason for—I know! This has to be some odd result of that damn back of the leg massage you gave me!! It has to be!! I don’t especially like bunnies…!!”

As Hamazura frantically tried to deny it, the expressionless and comforting girl that was Takitsubo Rikou softly placed a hand on his shoulder.

“Don’t worry, Hamazura. This is a hospital, so it’s okay if you get a bloody nose.

The doctors will heal you right away.”

“U-uhhh…!! You’re the only one that worries about me at times like this!!”

Hamazura seemed like he was about to collapse to the floor from that small bit of kindness.

“Don’t worry, Hamazura. I think this hospital also has a place that takes care of sicknesses of the mind, so you don’t have to worry about getting a nosebleed over bunnies.”

And then he was about to collapse to the floor for a completely different reason.

Part 3

Accelerator, Tsuchimikado Motoharu, Musujime Awaki and Unabara Mitsuki, the four of them were riding together in the same limo.

“The terrorists that started this incident are from an organisation named Spark Signal. It’s another organisation similar to Group losing control.”

After Tsuchimikado saying that in a bored manner, Unabara furrowed his brow.

“What is this ‘Spark Signal’?”

“To prevent people from gathering information using electrical waves, the walls surrounding Academy City will shoot strong directional interference waves into the air. Though cell phones will still work a meter away from the walls, any communications trying to go through the walls will be blocked. Even the radar is setup outside, and any normal communication has to be patched through a terminal.”

The security robots on the walls seem to use the data lines under their bodies to

connect to the lines on the ground to pass on information, Tsuchimikado continued to explain.

“But, there’s an exception. The higher ups have secret methods of communications, and there are always people who try to sell inside information of Academy City to the outside people. Spark Signal is a group that specializes in attacking those kind of people.”

Musujime’s expression became slightly unpleasant.

In the ‘Remnant’ incident she had contacted people outside of Academy City. For all she knew they probably had already fought with Spark Signal.

When Tsuchimikado got to the point where the Spark Signal had the same level of secrecy as the Hound Dogs, Accelerator’s brow twitched slightly. But Tsuchimikado ignored his reaction and continued,

“In other words, that Spark Signal started a strange seizing operation incident. They have now occupied the largest particle accelerator of the world which is situated inside Academy City; it’s called the Hula Hoop.”

Tsuchimikado said that as he operated something that looked like a TV remote.

On the large screen in the car a map of Academy City showed up. On it was a place marked with a different color, but it wasn’t any of the school districts. It was the outer wall that surrounded Academy City.

“The giant ring-shaped particle accelerator follows the shape of the wall, and built 200m under the ground. The terrorists that used to belong to the original Spark Signal group have now occupied the underground control center, and have started to make it operate without the safety features. Right now the protons inside it are being accelerated at 30% of the speed of light. …Of course, if anything doesn’t go as they demand it they will overload the particle accelerator. And once the protons have broken the accelerated circuit, not just the particle accelerator itself but a third of Academy City will not escape the fate of being covered by radiation.”

“As to where on the outer wall the explosion will happen, it depends entirely on chance,” Tsuchimikado said.

In other words, apart from the city center of Academy City, anyone else living in the city might be in danger of being caught up.

Hearing to this point, Unabara tilted his head and thought for a moment,

“That accelerator probably needs a lot of electricity to keep it running. Can’t we just cut it off directly from the power generators?”

“Since an emergency stop would need a lot of power, they have a back-up generator there. Needless to say Spark Signal will also be using that to operate the particle accelerator.”

“…Though they occupied the building, they haven’t initiated the overload immediately. This means they have some sort of ‘demand’.”

Towards Musujime’s question, Tsuchimikado only shook his head.

“The higher ups—some of the board of directors have already received their ‘demand’, but they didn’t give that piece of information to us. ‘Don’t think about unnecessary things, just kill off everyone that resists’.”

“Since they didn’t give us a time limit, it means things haven’t gotten that bad yet.”

Hearing Accelerator’s words, Tsuchimikado once again pushed a button on the remote.

Apart from the large ring that followed the outer wall, the screen showed another two smaller rings. Just like the distorted annual rings of a tree, the rings intersected each other.

“That’s not quite right. According to the different stages in speed, Hula Hoop is split into first, second and third rings, and accelerates particles separately starting from the smallest one. From the confirmed information on hand right now, the terrorists have started to move towards the third ring, as in the accelerator located at the outer bounds of the city.”

“So what?”

At Unabara’s urging, Tsuchimikado smiled and replied,

“From the configuration, the third ring cannot work at a low speed of 30% of the speed of light. That’s something that can only be used in experiments that force particles to go over 70% of the speed of light… looks like we weren’t given all of the information. Though we don’t know if it’s just them trying to ‘save face’, or to prevent widespread panic by hiding information.”

“So even if the current situation is extremely dire, they still won’t tell us everything huh?”

Accelerator spat out those words in an extremely bored manner.

“I’m not motivated. No matter how serious this is they haven’t gotten to the point of ‘begging us with tears in their eyes’. Let’s forget this. When they start to beg us to step in then we’ll do it.”

“Then I’ll give you some information to motivate you.”

Tsuchimikado pressed another button on the remote, and another window popped up on the screen. What was shown on it was a school bus. For some reason, the front tires of the school bus had burst, and the doors forcibly broken.

“Before Spark Signal attacked Hula Hoop, they kidnapped around 30 primary school students on an astronomy field trip, along with their teacher and driver as a ‘bargaining chip’. If their demands are denied they might start killing hostages periodically.”

“…”

“They could also use the workers at the Hula Hoop for hostages, but those are people that are necessary for Hula Hoop to continue to function. If we let them drag this out, it will definitely end up in a protracted battle. Spark Signal deliberately took hostages from somewhere else to prevent something like that. The higher ups must be worried sick about the safety measures of the Hula Hoop, and what about our safety measures? …Do we look like people that care about lives of small children?”

“Boring. We have no reason to play along with them.”

Accelerator said that as if to cut off this conversation.

There was not a single trace of compassion in his words.

He was a full-blown villain.

For this Level 5 had a dark heart within him and continued to speak in a manner as if to put everything about others' lives behind him,

"…What an eye-sore. For this kind of boring thing let's finish this quickly."

Part 4

Hamazura Shiage and Kinuhata Saiai headed to the shopping district at night.

They weren't there for a particularly amorous reason. They were simply making preparations for the party celebrating Takitsubo Rikou's release from the hospital. However, their preparations were on such short notice that they couldn't do anything too elaborate.

"By the way, what exactly are we going to do for a party?"

"We have a room in a private salon in District 3, so we'll get all sorts of super party goods, head back to the hospital, and super collect Takitsubo-san. Then we just have to head to the private salon."

"A private salon…" muttered Hamazura.

Those facilities provided services similar to an extravagant karaoke box and they were popular with upper class kids because it allowed them to easily rent out a secret base. Some people might wonder what value something like that had, but in a city where most students lived in dorms, getting away from the eyes of the adults was quite valuable.

However, a place like that had the danger of being one wrong step away from being a hotbed of sexual crimes, so the teachers and guardians were not too fond

of them.

As he thought about all that, Kinuhata started speaking next to him.

“Hamazura, what are you going to super do?”

“Ahn? Well, we can just order food from the private salon, so I was thinking we should go around looking for joke goods that a group of people can—”

“No, that’s not what I meant,” Kinuhata interrupted him before asking her question again. “The organization we belonged to, Item, has been super destroyed. Because of that, you super aren’t needed to work underneath it. That’s what I’m asking about. …What are you going to super do?”

“I’m just responding to your question with a question, but what are *you* going to do?”

“Well, it’s gonna be super the same for me. Item may be super gone, but the other day I was super forced to make an assassination regarding the Stargate stuff. Even now, they are in the process of starting a new team. According to the person on the phone, plenty of bloody jobs are still super waiting for me. That said, Takitsubo-san cannot fight, so there is no merit in super including her, so you don’t have to worry about that,” Kinuhata smoothly replied.

It seemed she did not have any real opposition to that environment.

“Hamazura, what are you going to super do?”

“Well…” he began.

The sun had fully set, so stars could be seen even in the night sky of that large city.

“It might be unfair to Hanzou, but I have no real intention of going back to Skill-Out. I don’t know what I can do, but I have to do something to bring Takitsubo back to the normal world. She can’t use Body Crystal anymore and I know that this world isn’t so kind that she can survive in it in her state. So I need to think about what I can do.”

It wasn’t quite a proper answer, but it was exactly the kind of thing a dumb thug

would say. However, his words were not something he had no chance of following through on.

Hamazura Shiage had once defeated one of the Level 5s.

However, that battle had certainly not been easy. Hamazura had been chased down to the very verge of death, but *this* had been the driving force that had allowed him to move his shaking legs to oppose her when it had come down to it. There was weight behind his words.

In every other way, he may be a dumb thug, but in that one way, he was not.

Kinuhata looked over at the side of Hamazura's face as he stared up at the night sky.

"…In other words, Hamazura, you plan on super forcing your own tastes on Takitsubo-san's life and super dedicating her to your passions by super removing that track suit that is overflowing with practicality and having her wear a bunny suit instead?"

"Do you still see me that way? Is that view completely fixed? Look, I admit I like bunny girls, but you've got it all wrong. The most important thing is that it's a swimsuit-like outfit and the unbalanced aspect of being in a place where swimsuits aren't normally worn is wonderful, so a companion girl at a motor show is perfectly fine with m—"

"Waah! Super stop, Hamazura. I get it, I super get it. You want to pass a treaty that would make every woman in the world super wear bunny suits. Just stop super staring at me with that obscene look."

"Oh, c'mon," said Hamazura shaking his head. "As a connoisseur of such things, let me tell you something. Someone like you just can't pull off a bunny suit."

"…And let me super tell you something. A middle school girl like me has a super better body than a high school girl like Takitsubo-san."

"Yeah, right!! You may not be able to tell over Takitsubo's track suit, but I've seen her without it and it's amazing!! And I've seen that there's nothing surprising hidden below that dress of yours!!"

“I think I need to super kill you. It’s fine if I super kill you, right?”

With a roar, something like wind gathered around Kinuhata’s hands.

Her power was Offense Armor. She was a Level 4 that could freely control the nitrogen in the air. Her effective range was exceedingly low, so her limit was a few centimeters from her palms, but it was incredibly powerful. She could repel a shot from a sniper rifle with her bare hands and could lift a table weighing a few dozen kilograms with one hand.

Hamazura would not be able to endure being punched by that dangerous skill.

“Mh!?”

But then Kinuhata herself stopped in shock just before taking action. The instant the large amount of nitrogen had gathered in her palms, the pseudo-wind created had caused her dress’s skirt to flutter.

The very instant before the panties within her skirt became visible, she pushed down the skirt with one hand.

“That was a super close one. You were just about to have some super material to masturbate to tonight.”

“…That definitely goes in the top five worst things I’ve ever had said to me. But you don’t have to worry. I’m not interested in some brat’s unfashionable panties. What’s sexy is an older girl who would look good in a bunny suit…”

“…”

Kinuhata Saiai was a girl who truly hated to lose, so she grabbed the front of her miniskirt with both hands and then lifted her hands up with no forewarning.

“Hamazura, Hamazura. Look, look, it’s a super skirt flip!”

“Ohhhhhhh!? I…I can see…I can’t see anything!! What? It was a feint? You let go of your skirt the instant before and only lifted your arms!? Don’t surprise me like that!!”

After giving such an honest reaction, Hamazura realized that Kinuhata had a

huge grin on her face.

“Hoh hohh. I thought you super weren’t interested?”

“You were testing me!? Well, I was only shocked by that because it caught me off guard. I-It’s not like I was hoping for anything.”

“Once more!”

“Fnhhhhhhhh!! D-dammit. I know it’s just a cruel feint, but…fuck!! Why do I do that!?”

“Hm, it seems I can just super play around with you all I want. Hamazura, have you figured out yet that you’re just super Hamazura-y? It’s 100,000 years too soon for a sexual animal lower even than a caveman to super debate whether I, Kinuhata-sama, am sexy or not. To be blunt, you’re super too full of yourself. You need to at least evolve further as an animal first.”

“…No.”

Despite having been beaten down and sunken into darkness, Hamazura once more lifted his head.

A fighting spirit resided in his eyes.

“I’ve changed!! I am no longer the kind of man who will be defeated by this ordinary sort of despair!! I will stand up once more. Come at me, Kinuhata! I will overcome the allure of your thighs!!”

“Heh heh. So you’re going to super oppose me despite the fact that you will never make it beyond being Villager A? Now this is getting interesting, super Hamazura. Now, read the saga of your sexuality and super despair!! Skirt flip!!”

The great demon lord that was Kinuhata started her ultimate attack.

“Ohhh, Takitsubo! Lend me strength!!” yelled the hero that was Hamazura as he brought out even the brave heart hidden within him.

But Kinuhata’s pinkies must have gotten caught on the miniskirt.

On that third attack, she truly did bring her dress’s skirt straight up.

The wool skirt that looked a bit like a sweater floated up and the small white piece of cloth that was meant to be hidden within was in clear view. The way she stood with her thighs rubbing together was surprisingly feminine and the way the panties at their base were pulled up just a little too tightly made the scene perfect.

And the hero that was Hamazura lost.

Two streams of red liquid shot from his nose as the hero gave his dying words.

“No faaaaaaaaiiiiiiiirrrrrrrr!! Feint, feint, the real deal!? What the hell is with that technique of attacking differently once I’m truly prepared for the original attack? That’s the kind of carefully planned out intellectual plan that uses the design theories of a genius short comedy routine or a haunted house!?”

Of course, it had not been carefully planned out; it had been a complete accident. As such, Kinuhata stood there with her arms lifted up towards the heavens trembling silently as her skirt fell back down due to gravity.

“I’m gonna super kill you!!”

“You destroy my heart and now you’re going to finish me off physically!? You really show no mercy, oh great demon lord!!”

Hamazura fled while Kinuhata chased him.

Shortly thereafter, some humorous sound effects resounded throughout the Academy City shopping district.

Part 5

The limo that Accelerator, Tsuchimikado Motoharu, Musujime Awaki and Unabara Mitsuki, were riding together in was currently heading for District 23.

The world's largest particle accelerator, Hula Hoop, followed around the outer walls of Academy City and was 200m underground. Its control center was the same, it was near the outer edges of the district that bordered the outer walls. Terrorists had occupied the place, taken hostages, and passed on 'demands' via the network.

"Come to think of it, what happened to that 'man on the other side of the phone'? With something like this happening, shouldn't we have gotten a call from him?"

"Hell if I know. If he doesn't want to contact us we can't get to him no matter what. If he doesn't have something else on at this time then he must be on holiday or something."

"Ara, are you worried because he isn't contacting you?"

"Watch out before I rip your foul mouth apart, you idiot."

Accelerator and Musujime Awaki glared at each other, but Group didn't mind things like this.

Unabara was polishing his obsidian knife while asking Tsuchimikado,

"Are there any movements from Anti-Skill?"

"Apparently the excuse of a specialized anti-terrorist team is being sent out stopped them from mobilizing. And actually, if normal Anti-Skills got involved in something like this chances are they would only make it worse."

Tsuchimikado answered while taking apart his handgun with practiced ease.

"To prevent the Hula Hoop that's built 200m under the ground from releasing gamma rays in case of accidents, there are protection walls the level of nuclear

shelters built around it. Trying to cut a hole out of it or even blow one out using dynamite would be impossible.”

“Can’t we use the elevators?”

“There are plenty of other walls inside as well. The elevator cables are all placed in niches in the walls, just like an automatic door. The other lines are the same.”

“Dawdling movements will just tell them we’re coming. If we are found blowing up doors and walls the terrorists from Spark Signal will probably blow the hostages’ heads off.”

Musujime Awaki was shifting her military flashlight that she used as a weapon in her pocket continuously, to make sure she could draw it out easily when she needed it.

Unabara wiped off some murky water on his dagger.

“What’s the situation inside?”

“We’ve already gone over this. To prevent gamma rays leaking, the walls there are extremely thick, normal radiowaves won’t be able to get through. Drilling a hole to get a camera inside is also not possible. Though we have the schematics now, we still don’t have any idea how many are deployed in there.”

“Then what about those ‘nano-machines’?”

As soon as Musujime said that, the atmosphere inside the limo tensed up.

Nano-machines called Underline were spread throughout the city, observing everything that happened there without pause. Of course, Hula Hoop would also be one of the places under surveillance.

“If they completely closed down the safety doors the network should have been disrupted… then again, if there is hidden technology it won’t be surprising.”

Tsuchimikado paused at this point.

“Also, ‘on the surface’ we don’t know about the existence of the nano-machines. So even if there is information from that, it won’t get to us.”

“The most troublesome thing here would be that we don’t know how many of them we need to take down before everything is over. It won’t be good if we get shot in the back as soon as we relax.”

“Then we’ll just throw the guy that won’t be hurt even if shot to deal with it.”

Tsuchimikado put together the handgun he had disassembled earlier and pointed at the make-shift bed.

The one sitting there was Accelerator. He could reflect all of the attacks.

“I don’t have any intentions of listening to orders coming from the bastard-with-sunglasses, but this is a lot easier than trusting my back to you people.”

Accelerator said that while glaring viciously at Tsuchimikado.

“But what method are we going to use to break in? Pierce through the 200m of walls and earth with one blow?”

… That comment seemed to have disregarded all of the premises, but there was indeed one person here that could do that.

But Tsuchimikado shook his head.

“Forget it. Not counting Spark Signal, if we drag the hostages and the machinery into the attack it would be troublesome. We’ll do this the usual way, using Musujime’s ability to ignore the limits of three-dimensions.”

Her Move Point worked just like Teleport, ignoring obstacles like walls and ceilings to send whatever she wanted to somewhere else.

At this time, the person in question furrowed her brows.

“Transport a mass as large as a human precisely onto a point 200m away, to a place that I’ve only seen on a schematic and not in person? There’s probably a 50% chance of being buried alive inside the walls or in the ground. If you still want to do that regardless of the risks then I don’t mind.”

“You won’t have to do anything that difficult.”

Tsuchimikado laughed.

“District 23 is filled with aviation and space technology facilities, so it’s only runways all over the sector. But with that, the space above ground would be wasted; so, how do they get the building space for research and development?”

“What are you trying to say?”

“…In other words, it’s pretty spacious down there. Though it’s not directly linked with Hula Hoop, the direct distance between two points can be shortened somewhat. We can use Musujime’s Move Point to launch Accelerator there.”

As they talked, the limo reached the District 23.

Originally, in accordance to counter-terrorism strategy ordinary cars that were not business-use cars or specialized buses were forbidden to enter, but they were allowed to do so anyway.

In the runway-covered District 23, there were comparatively few tall buildings. The limo was parked at one of the buildings branching off from a school’s gymnasium.

The four of them got off immediately.

Accelerator’s crutch sprung four tiny claws to grab the ground, and Musujime’s eyes couldn’t help but to open wide at the sight.

“Did you just make that crutch? You sure are enthusiastic in your work.”

“Shut up and get out of my way. Are you the wordy housewife that suspects the husband is cheating on you due to a slight mess in his clothing?”

As they verbally sparred casually, Accelerator and others walked into a low building. It was a testing site for aviation weaponry. Of course, they were heading for the underground beneath there.

Tsuchimikado used the access code he had gotten from somewhere to open the lock for the elevator that was reserved for authorized personnel only. The four of them took a ride in the rectangular box and descended 150m at once.

Accelerator felt a sense of unease near his collarbone.

(…After getting this far down is the radiowave reception getting worse…?)

He unconsciously touched the choker-style electrode on his neck, but he couldn't do anything about it.

Outside the elevator was a wide open space like a department store or an office building. Everywhere was polished to the point it sparkled. Though there were no windows, the countless light sources could almost make people forget they were still underground.

Accelerator and others' destination wasn't one of these rooms, but the wall that was the closest to the edge.

Tsuchimikado looked at the map on his cell phone as he tapped the wall like knocking the door to a club president's room.

"Here it is. Going down 30 degrees to the east, 80m away is a corridor leading to the Hula Hoop control facility. There is no closer distance than this, and the target location is spacious enough."

"80 meters, huh."

"In terms of capability, a certain middle-school student in Judgment can do something of this level as well."

"…You sure have quite an annoying mouth. I'll do it already."

Musujime glared at Tsuchimikado who deliberately reminded her of that twin-tailed Teleporter, and walked towards the wall.

After that, she turned to Accelerator.

"Then, should we start the dimension-hopping now?"

"Wait."

The one who spoke wasn't Accelerator, but Tsuchimikado Motoharu.

"Your electrode is having trouble now, right?"

“…”

“Wait for another 15 minutes. I’ll use the cables from the elevator to make a simple antenna that will allow the radiowaves to reach the facility.”

“Do you need my help?”

Even though I have no tools with me right now. Towards Unabara who added that last sentence, Tsuchimikado only shook his head.

“You go contact the ‘man on the other side of the phone’. Using the emergency lines you should be able to reach a temporary connection with the board of directors. After contacting them make preparations to make sure no other forces or specialists get in our way. It’s not our problem if they want to get themselves killed, but if they get dragged into this it’ll get troublesome.”

After that, Tsuchimikado smiled at Unabara who was standing at one side with his head tilted, with an expression saying ‘Why me?’, and said,

“It’s because your looks are very popular with old people nyaa.”

“This is just a complete fake.”

This teenage boy who wasn’t Japanese, let alone Asian, scratched his face that was fairly popular with the Japanese people.

Tsuchimikado finally turned to face Accelerator,

“Listen up. We start in 15 minutes. Though I think there probably won’t be any problems, before we start I suggest you check your electrode once again, make sure no other problems pop up. It doesn’t matter if you die, but I definitely won’t allow the kids that were taken hostage to get hurt.”

Part 6

This world’s largest particle accelerator, Hula Hoop, that was built 200m

underground, could accelerate protons to 99.22% of the speed of light, and maintain that speed for up to 300 seconds.

But, even such a large device had its own limits.

Surpassing the speed it was designed to hold, or running it longer than it was supposed to would both lead to Hula Hoop's explosion; that meant enough gamma radiation to cover a third of Academy City would be released.

But up to this point, this boy didn't know any of that.

Before, he didn't have the memory of having guns pointed at his head by masked men, or the experience of having his hands tied behind his back by someone else. The time where he trembled as around 30 people which included his classmates, teacher, and the driver was also a nightmare that he had never experienced in reality.

"Stabilizing at 50% of speed of light. Hula Hoop is only a restricting measure, it's not a bargaining chip. That's why we captured these brats."

"If we go too far the higher ups will blow us sky-high along with this underground facility. There are no civilian structures above our heads, just bare runways, so they can make this place blow up to their heart's content."

"That's why we needed Hula Hoop, isn't it? As long as we make it appear as if this place will explode any time, we can stop the board of directors' desperate actions."

"Confirm the escape routes. After negotiations we'll explode a small section of the control facility when the outer ring of Hula Hoop while it's operating at 70% lightspeed. Then we'll put on the anti-radiation powered suits at emergency shelter B and break through while they are hurriedly preparing for their own anti-radiation gear."

Dangerous and outlandish words floated above the boy's head.

There were no signs that he would be released safely.

It didn't matter if things took a turn for better or worse, there was no future for him and the others here.

Despair had taken over his brain and it reverberated throughout his body.

“It’s time.”

Ignoring the boy that shook uncontrollably at one side, one of the masked men that looked like their leader looked at his watch and said,

“Mah, from the start I didn’t think we’d get the higher ups to respond without ‘taking care of’ at least one person… is the camera ready? We’ll start the negotiations for real soon, hurry up with that.”

After hearing those words filled with hints, the masked underlings started to move. The recording equipment was nothing special, it was just an add-on on one of their cell phones. Though to prevent it being traced a strange machine had been added onto the cable leading from it.

“The images and sound can be transmitted at any time now.”

“The direct links to the Anti-Skill Headquarters and the board of directors are complete. With one signal we can have a live recording.”

“Alright, let us begin.”

As soon as his words left his mouth, the man who looked like the leader grabbed the boy’s hair with one hand. The fear that exceeded the pain made him cry out loudly, but the other party completely ignored it. The boy was then dragged all the way in front of the camera.

Words of objection were sealed before they were even yelled out of his mouth.

In the hands of the man who looked like the leader was a gun that looked like the real thing in anyone’s eyes.

“Give him a final mercy and cover his eyes.”

Resistance was futile. Both his hands were tied behind his back; but even if they were not, what could a single child do? Immediately a strip of cloth was tied around his head and covered his sight.

“Make him kneel and start the live broadcast.”

In the darkness, his wrist was being grabbed by someone and he was lifted up. Somebody stepped behind him and a cold, hard touch came in contact with the back of his head.

The high-performance focal aperture on the cell phone camera moved slightly, and next to the boy's ear the sound of a small motor rang out.

The man that stood behind him said the following in a manner like speaking from a script which had been prepared earlier:

"We wished to solve this in a peaceful manner, having once and again given you the alternative where blood will not have to be shed; but the answer we received is not the one we wanted. We must have made you misunderstand us, made you think we didn't have the courage to take decisive action. If that was the case we apologize here."

'kacha'

The boy could feel the hair on the back of his neck rising.

"To give you the ability to decide, this time we'll hint at our intention. But, this is an action that was originally not necessary, and the blood that will flow is one that is not needed. Grieve, and regret your foolish decisions."

A *kacha* sound came from the gun that was pointed at the back of his head.

Though he didn't realize that was the hammer being pulled by the thumb, but he could understand that was a key signal for something.

"In addition, if you do not make a decision soon, we promise more unnecessary blood will flow. We will not be stingy in that manner. We are willing to gather everything that will change your minds. So, we will be using everything that we have to their furthest extent. Though we do not wish to do so."

He wanted to run away.

He wanted to scream.

But if he did that, the worst outcome would arise.

“Then, we’ll use the first one.”

If he stayed silent he would only be killed.

Even if he knew that, if he resisted he would only be killed earlier.

He didn’t dare to move.

Even if he knew he would be killed if he didn’t move, he couldn’t even move a finger on his hands that were tied behind his back.

“Let’s start the negotiation here.”

Regret.

As the boy found he still had that emotion under this terror, he finally opened his trembling mouth.

“…This kind of…”

This wasn’t begging for his life; he was not begging for his life.

“…This kind of plan, it cannot possibly succeed…”

On the contrary,

“No matter how much you people scheme, no matter what kind of horrible weapon you prepare, your crimes will never be forgiven.”

At least, he was fighting back at the end of the end.

“That’s what I believe. This world is far kinder than any of you villains believe!! No matter what you have planned to escape, there will be heroes to come and apprehend you! Everyone will be saved. Somewhere in this wide world there will be someone that will come and save everyone!”

“Really?”

The man who looked like he was the leader spoke for the first time to the boy.

Except that his words were extremely simple.

“Even if such heroes exist, they will not make it in time to save you.”

Small weak sounds of trembling reached his ears.

They were the sounds coming from the inside of the gun and passing right through to his skull. The index finger slowly pulling the trigger, the small springs starting to contract.

At this time, the boy that had his eyes covered went further and even closed his eyes.

Even so, to the end the boy mouthed,

“(…I believe.)”

‘Don!’ A sound of gunfire rang out.

That sound shook the boy’s skull, and his surroundings were filled with the smell of rust.

In that instant,

Inside the control facility of the world’s largest particle accelerator, Hula Hoop, authentic sounds of gunfire rang out. Red-black liquid splattered across the floor, the air was permeated with the smell of rust, and mixed in with it was the distinctive smell of gunpowder burning. The sound of the shell falling onto the ground followed after that.

Undoubtedly, he had opened fire.

The merciless bullet had been shot out and pierced muscle and bone.

A dull thud, being the sound of the boy’s small figure falling onto the hard ground. The clothes designed for kids were dyed completely red. It couldn’t be mistaken for anything other than blood.

Except,

That, was not the boy’s own blood.

That was something that flowed out of the arms of the man who looked like the leader.

From beside him, in his blind spot, another person had shot the arm of the masked man.

“Wha—”

After blankly looking at his arm—the gun was blasted out, his arm was twisted unnaturally by 45 degrees, the man who looked like the leader felt pain only a moment later.

But, screams did not ring out.

As soon as that man’s eyes left the camera and looked outside the area covered by it, more gunshots followed. After the sounds of *don don don*, the man who looked like the leader was shot all over his body and blown away.

The panicked voices of the other masked men overlapped each other.

But at this time, ‘that somebody outside the camera view’ continued to fire. The man that was filming with a cell phone was shot, and collapsed along with the machine. The higher ups that were watching the live broadcast only saw the view turning up towards the ceiling, then gray static.

Because the lens was shattered.

Because he couldn't see and could only hear the sounds, the boy with his eyes covered opened his mouth,

With a voice that couldn't stop shaking, a weak voice.

“A h-hero…?”

“A villain.”

After that,

An evil reply, as if to overturn everything here.

“A villain that’s just like a piece of shit.”

‘Kacha’

The villain’s shoe completely smashed the cell phone being used for recording.

With that sound as the signal, the battle with the #1 of Academy City began!

Part 7

Level 5s were still human.

It didn’t matter if it was the #1 or anyone else, they were all primates.

No matter what kind of special ability they possessed, if they didn’t breathe or didn’t eat they would die. They had a limited life-span, and if stabbed they would also bite the dust.

If they were humans with the same weaknesses, then there would be a way to kill them.

Spark Signal originally was a special force made to combat those that planned to leak inside information of Academy City to those on the outside. In their activities they had also fought with powerful espers countless times. So, when facing espers that could create incredible phenomena, Spark Signal could respond appropriately. First calmly analyze the opponent, then find a way to defeat him.

The masked men of Spark Signal had believed that all this time.

That was something they firmly believed in.

However,

Was the #1 of Academy City really human?

Boom! A sound that swept through the air exploded out.

The multiple bullets in his hands shot out, and each of them accurately pierced through the terrorists of Spark Signal.

Of course, they hadn’t come here to just die when they planned this large-scale mission. At this place, this time, as a human they all felt their lives were in danger. To be released from this threat, they unreservedly used all the techniques and knowledge they had learned up to this point, bringing their full strength to fight back against the white-haired esper.

Some of them tried to shoot with their rifles from behind cover.

Some of them tried to use hostages to stop their opponent’s movement.

Some of them tried to use dynamite to destroy the columns and bury their opponent in the rubble.

These were good actions, except it was all meaningless.

Forget about it even having an effect, there was no value in even trying.

The bullets didn’t work.

As soon they touched the monster’s skin, they were reflected back and shot the terrorists themselves.

Taking hostages didn’t work.

As soon as they tried to reach for the kids, their wrists were twisted in an unnatural manner.

Dynamite didn’t work.

As soon as they tried to push the button for it to explode, their fingers were

blown away along with the button.

(No…)

It was more than just these, one of the masked members of Spark Signal thought.

That face of his that could not be seen from outside was already covered with cold sweat. He felt that the essence of the escalating terror in his heart was more than just those.

Yes.

The #1 esper of Academy City, Accelerator, was taking all of this completely seriously.

He didn't excessively use his overwhelming power. Even seeing the terrorist falling one after another he did not get careless. If he relaxed then maybe they still had a chance, but Accelerator didn't even give that small possibility to his opponents.

Sometimes with his ability, sometimes with his handgun, he always used the smallest amount of effort to obtain the greatest results. It was no longer a battle between humans, or even between humans and a monster. Simple destruction that needed no emotions.

For example,

It was just like a homing missile that was closing in on a fighter plane that tried desperately to run away.

This wasn't a matter of winning or losing, but whether you get hit. If it hit there was not much chance of surviving. The disaster that Accelerator spread had already reached that level.

(Do you know how much effort we put in to create this plan…)

Staring blankly at the Level 5 who, with some kind of ability, soared through the air in an arc to strike at one of his comrades, this man tried desperately to make his confused head work.

(We’ve used everything Spark Signal has, apart from the main plan there were many other back-up plans… We’ve clearly prepared to this extent, clearly… In the end we’re still taken down like weeds…?!)

At this time,

Inside a pool of deep red blood, that monster who had just ripped apart one of his comrades and taken away his ability to think turned its head towards him.

(What do I do…)

Those crimson eyes met his own eyes head on.

That looked just like an infrared aiming scope, Spark Signal’s terrorist thought.

(What…?!)

It couldn’t even be called a showdown.

He was aimed at, and then shot.

In total, it only took 300 seconds.

The world’s largest particle accelerator, Hula Hoop, had become peaceful once more.

Part 8

The boy understood.

Though he had his eyes covered and could not see what had happened, but the tense atmosphere that could ignite with a single touch had vanished. The world of despair made by the terrorists was slowly disappearing.

Around him came a sound of gasping from fright.

It was probably from the boy’s classmates and teacher.

From their heavy breathing not a trace of relief could be felt, as the method of solving the problem had been so overly violent.

The boy struggled desperately with his hands tied behind his back, and right before the rope grinded through his skin, one of his hands was finally released from the binding. With that shaking hand he took off his blindfold.

The long absence from light made him dizzy.

He reached his hand towards the fluorescent lights, narrowed his eyes and looked around. ‘That person’ should still be around. The boy who thought that suddenly turned his head towards a certain direction.

Next to the wall.

One of the terrorists who had been struck down was lying there in his dying moments. A white-haired person with a crutch stood parallel with the terrorist. Except that he could not see the face of the white-haired person. What expression this person, who had his back to him, had on his face could not be seen from his point of view.

…The boy was submerged in that atmosphere in an instant.

But, this didn’t seem like reality.

Because, in the next instant that white-haired person disappeared into thin air. Without any warning, almost like a plot in a movie, the white-haired person vanished without a trace.

The boy looked blankly at the empty space there.

A villain that was just like a piece of shit.

His mind kept thinking about the one who he believed was a hero, but had unhesitatingly replied with those words.

Part 9

“Thank you for your hard work. You did a good job, O Great He~ro~ <3”

As Musujime actually tried to talk to Accelerator in that way, he almost pulled the trigger on her in his anger.

His sudden disappearance was obviously her helping him retreat with her Move Point. Spark Signal had been eliminated, what was left was for the Hula Hoop’s workers to unlock the doors and the escalators, and get the children out above ground quickly.

There was no more room for villains to step in on the stage.

Accelerator looked around him. This was the underground where they had been before their assault, a place that tested aviation weaponry. In this place where the walls were polished until it sparkled like a high-class market, apart from Musujime both Unabara and Tsuchimikado were there.

“There’s something I really mind. What did those pieces of shit terrorists actually demand from the higher ups?”

After hearing Accelerator’s words, Tsuchimikado’s brows raised slightly.

“…While you were there in your rampage we tried to investigate, but their defenses are more robust than what we thought. We can only guess this is something that the higher ups really don’t want others to know.”

“I didn’t expect you to get anything useful at all. Shut up and listen, fool.”

After Accelerator finished insulting others, he brought the conversation back to the main point.

“When I was suppressing those bastards in Hula Hoop I heard some of their conversations. They were saying with tears in their eyes ‘At this rate we won’t be able to achieve our objective’ and things like that.”

“…Did they leak out what their demands were?”

Faced with Unabara’s urging, Accelerator went silent.

Then, he replied,

“-- ‘Dragon’.”

That word with only six letters in it made the atmosphere around them tense up in an instant.

That classified information which had only its name recorded even in the secret nano-machine information network Underline. Even for Accelerator and the others with him, who walked the bottommost of the dark side, didn't know the truth of it. But was this a breakthrough point that could allow them to fight the higher ups of the massive Academy City? It was not hard to deduce that this was a word that had a huge meaning to it.

Accelerator, Tsuchimikado Motoharu, Unabara Mitsuki and Musujime Awaki.

They had a temporary alliance as they sought the truth of Dragon for their different goals.

However,

From the looks of it, the ones investigating Dragon was not just limited to them.

Just like presenting evidence, Accelerator said,

“*Immediately release all information related to Dragon.* That was, apparently, the demand of those brain-dead terrorists. In the end we’ve been fooled by the higher ups, and cut down our only link to it with our eyes wide open.”

Between the lines 1

Academy City’s first district was lined with administrative and judicial facilities

and it did not have the sense of livelihood that other, more normal districts had. It had almost no residences or restaurants. In exchange for gathering together all of the functions needed for smoothly operating such a large city, only the bare minimum of functionality for people to live there was prepared. The extremely mechanical cityscape helped reinforce that image of the district.

A single terribly unique building was mixed in with the mostly consistent cityscape of District 1.

It was an office of the board of directors.

Since it took up an entire skyscraper, it went beyond the level of what one would normally think an “office” was. Since its maintenance was paid for entirely with tax money, it may have been more accurate to call it an “official residence”. At any rate, the luxurious building had actually only been prepared for the sole use of one of those 12 influential people within Academy City.

His name was Thomas Platinumburg.

The master of that building was in a splendid and spacious room that was reminiscent of the audience chambers seen in RPG castles. The room took up an entire floor of the building and was used as a reception room. He had no subordinates around. Given his position, it would not have been surprising for him to have had countless guards, but he had sent everyone else away from that large room. He was meeting a guest in his role as a member of the board of directors.

His guest was a mercenary sniper he had personally invited from outside the city.

She was a tall woman. She had white skin and long blonde hair. She possessed a beauty that would have looked more fitting shining under a spotlight than on a dirty battlefield. However, she had a bag large enough to fit an entire person into lying at her feet as she sat on a sofa. The bag most likely contained her stock in trade.

She was a fairly famous woman in her business.

It wasn’t quite clear if being famous was a good thing in her business.

“How is Sunazara Chimitsu-san doing, Stephanie Gorgeouspalace-san?”

Thomas spoke two people's names.

Stephanie was the name of the sniper and Sunazara was the name of the man who she looked up to as a mentor.

She obediently nodded in response to Thomas's question.

"His progress is going well. He has not regained consciousness yet, though. Really, it is all thanks to the fact that you lent us an Academy City life support system. If you had not, he would have been gone already."

"Oh, think nothing of it. It was painful enough knowing that your comrade was injured at the hands of someone from Academy City due to an unfortunate turn of events."

The five underground organizations of Group, Item, Block, Member, and School had once fought leading to the destruction of a few of them. Sunazara Chimitsu had been hired by one of them and had been defeated by the member of a different one. Explosives had blown the entire building away and he had been injured to the point that he still had not regained consciousness.

When Thomas Platinumburg had received that information, he had secretly recovered the man and sent him, life support system equipped bed and all, outside of the city to Stephanie.

Of course, he had not done it out of good will.

He had done it to have her feel obligated to help him so he could have the advantage in some business he had to carry out.

"So who is the target you wish me to take out?"

"I have documents prepared elsewhere, but I am sure you will recognize the name. He is Academy City's #1 Level 5 known as Accelerator."

That request was not on behalf of the leading members of Academy City.

It was an exceedingly personal request.

On September 30, Accelerator had fought the Hound Dog unit led by Kihara

Amata and the boy had attacked Thomas Platinumburg's residence in order to acquire information. In that attack, he had shot Thomas with a shotgun. Thomas's current action was motivated by revenge.

While it was pure revenge on the emotional side, it would also serve to get any of his subordinates who were growing lax in their duties to shape up.

"Can you do it?"

"If you tell me to, then yes."

He had expected that response. He had made sure his subordinates were not around for the negotiation as a whole, but mostly because he had prepared a trump card.

"When sniping the target, you need not worry about any damages to the surrounding area. I will cover for anyone or anything that gets damaged in the process. …So if you were to put a bullet in the former Item member Kinuhata Saiai who put Sunazara-san in his current state, there would be no real problem."

"Oh, I see. And you have already been so helpful in Sunazara-san's case. Academy City's technology truly is wonderful. That medical equipment truly is something you would never see anywhere else."

"Ha ha. Not all of the city's technology is good, but I am quite proud of the parts that can be used for peace."

"Indeed. It is amazing how you were able to put a tiny transmitter in Sunazara-san's body. It seems to work slightly differently from a nanodevice, but you truly cannot find devices that small implanted inside someone's body elsewhere."

Immediately afterwards, a chill permeated every inch of that huge room. No, the air had not actually changed. That was simply how it felt through the filter of Thomas Platinumburg's fear.

"Please wait," Thomas said holding out a hand. "You have no idea how important the information that could be gained from the technology used in that life support system is. It is targeted for use outside the city meaning it is at a lower grade, but even so it has incredibly valuable information on Academy City technology inside it. We wanted to send Sunazara Chimitsu-san quickly but

safely to you. However, having the technological information in the system would be a major problem. That is what the device is for. If we had not put that inside him, we could not have sent him to you so quickly."

"Oh, I see."

What Thomas Platinumburg did not realize at that time was something he had no real reason to have noticed, but it was still a fatal oversight.

Stephanie Gorgeouspalace did not usually speak so politely.

She was purposefully altering her speech patterns in order to force down her overflowing emotions.

"So the fact that the grain of rice-sized transmitter also had a mechanism inside it that sends out a special stimulus that allows four of Sunazara-san's organs to be stopped with a single signal…is merely a safety measure?"

Drops of cold sweat started dripping from Thomas's body.

But it was too late.

The next thing he knew, Stephanie's form on the sofa blurred from high speed movement and was suddenly standing right in front of Thomas. Her right hand was stretched out, directly stabbing a quill into his stomach.

Thomas did not even feel the pain of his skin and flesh being torn.

The pain was the least of his worries.

"*You can have this back.*"

As she pulled out the quill, Stephanie held a small radio in her hand. Thomas assumed that she had embedded something in the wound and that the radio's frequency was set to send a signal to that something. This thought brought such clear fear of death that his primitive sense of pain went completely numb.

"You made a mistake in trying to add in your little trick. If you had just handed Sunazara-san over and then come to me with your request, I would have readily acted as your pawn."

“…Wait…”

Thomas Platinumburg trembled as he stared at Stephanie…or more accurately, the thumb held up against the radio. He threw off the façade of polite speech and made his final piece of negotiation in a cracking voice.

“…If you…cause trouble here, you won’t be able to carry out your revenge… If you…help me…you can easily get revenge for Sunazara…”

“Oh, I forgot to tell you,” Stephanie responded without seeming to think about it at all.

She seemed to be bringing the conversation as a whole to a close.

“The target of my revenge is everyone in Academy City.”

Immediately afterwards, Stephanie unhesitatingly hit the switch on the radio.

The transmitter embedded in Thomas’s wound quickly responded by creating a special electrical stimulus. The man’s organs were functioning normally, but this quickly stopped four of them from functioning and reliably ended his life.

He screamed in his death agony.

Stephanie did not even look in the direction of the body that had fallen to the floor motionless as she put the radio in her pocket with a disinterested look on her face.

She heard footsteps approaching.

Most likely, the guards who wore black suits had heard their master’s scream. Her estimate based on the guard density she had seen on her way to the reception room was that there were about 200 of them.

However, Stephanie’s face did not grow even slightly cloudy. She opened the fastener on the giant bag at her feet while humming and pulled out her stock in trade that was stored inside.

It was not a sniper rifle.

It was a light machine shotgun.

It was a special gun based on the type of rapid-fire machine gun that could be carried around but was usually used while fixed on a tripod. It had been modified so that it only used shotgun ammunition. When fired at close range, the light machine shotgun held enough destructive power that it could transform an armored vehicle into what looked like a crushed can. It was Stephanie's personal custom gun.

The reason a supposed sniper like Stephanie had taken out such a dangerous weapon was quite simple.

"Sunazara-san always shot small and compact weapons from a distance."

Unlike when she spoke with Thomas, Stephanie Gorgeouspalace's speech patterns returned to normal with a bit of yearning mixed in as she muttered to herself.

"But it seems a hell of a lot easier to just get up close and fire like crazy!"

The large door to the room opened wide.

At the same instant, a disastrous storm spread out from the light machine shotgun.

Her revenge began.

Chapter 2: A Simple Yet Complex Problem.
V.S._Calamity.

Part 1

“I see.”

The voice of Shiokishi, a member of the board of directors, filled the RV.

However, that leader of the city was not actually in the RV with Accelerator and the others.

He was speaking from a live video being displayed on the screen.

“Well, what matters most is that the Hula Hoop incident was resolved without any major damage done. …In fact, I saw the report on the battle, and your specs are as amazing as ever.”

For once, Accelerator and the other three agreed on something, they did not want to hear that from him of all people.

It was not a gentle old man that would look good in a tuxedo being displayed on the screen.

Well, that might have been what he actually looked like, but that wasn’t what one saw on the screen.

It was a powered suit.

A powered suit was a collection of highly elastic wires and powerful motors that aided in movement with thick armor covering it. The word “weapon” fit it better

than the word “armor”. The short and stout mecha creaked as it sat in an elegant chair.

“Does it bother you?” Shiokishi said in a light voice, although it was unclear which of the four he was speaking to.

He did not seem even remotely uncomfortable about having them look at him so oddly.

“If you think about it rationally, it makes sense. This world is overflowing with things that will kill a human. People often say that it will never happen to them or that no one has any reason to hold a grudge against them…but that’s completely ridiculous. Whether there is some simple reason or not, when people die, they die. And the danger is even greater in a position like mine. If I want to escape any sudden misfortune, I believe I must always be on my guard.”

Shiokishi used the back of his large hand to tap the amber-colored table in front of him.

“That is the main reason that I have been so rude as to do this over a video feed instead of meeting you directly. This way, you do not have to know where I am.”

“What are you so fucking afraid of? You’re probably in some dome-shaped facility that’s on the level of a nuclear shelter.”

“And you think that is enough for me to rest easy? Far from it. This is Academy City. Let’s see, it’s Musujime-kun, right? For people with abilities like hers, the thickness of the walls means nothing. I’m ‘so fucking afraid’ of having a bomb thrown into this room this very instant.”

“…Despite both of you being on the board of directors, you give quite a different impression from Oyafune Monaka,” said Unabara Mitsuki.

He had likely been in contact with her during the Hula Hoop incident.

In contrast to Shiokishi, Oyafune started with trusting others and continued on with harmony and cooperation, making her a rare type among the collection of black-hearted influential people who were known as the board of directors.

“No, Oyafune-kun has her own type of defense,” said Shiokishi. “Much like

with the JSDF, she shows off the fact that she is safe and has no ability to invade which keeps others from having a pretext on which to attack. In its own way, that is a very high level skill. I certainly couldn't emulate it. …Although, she used to be quite skilled at the art of conversation. I guess her daughter had a major effect on her..."

Shiokishi wrapped his arms around the short body of the powered suit.

"But this still leaves me a little uneasy. If I could, I would feel safer using cyborg technology to remake my body itself instead of wearing something, but it seems there are still various issues with that. I believe the delicate equipment has a lifespan of 5 years or thereabouts and having to undergo major surgery to switch out the artificial organs every 5 years is too heavy a burden. Having the individual artificial organs kept compact in a single life support system built into the powered suit lightens that burden and while a cyborg cannot overcome the barrier of the physical body's capacity, the devices in a powered suit can be easily replaced. I admit that it's actually just an advanced version of a hospital bed or handheld oxygen tank, but for me, it's—"

"Shiokishi-san," said Tsuchimikado cutting him off because he knew that idiots would go on forever when they got fixated on certain subjects. "I'm sure you did not go out of your way to contact us just to allow us to submit our battle reports. It would have been faster to do that via the 'voice on the phone'."

"You have probably vaguely picked up on it, but the agent that commands you four is otherwise occupied. There is more than one incident going on in Academy City right now. …I thought it would be taken care of already, but I never expected for that youth who sits at the same table to be done in."

"…"

"You don't need to be suspicious. You don't need to feel uneasy about the information that isn't disclosed to you, because it is all connected. If you do what you must do, you will gather all the information before long."

At that point, the camera shook. Shiokishi called for some people he referred to as "Sugitani-kun" and "Minobe-kun" and then someone from outside the view of the camera grabbed the camera and moved it back to its proper position.

"Anyway, I am here to ask you to carry out your next job."

“…Did something else happen so soon?” Tsuchimikado asked being reminded of the incident that had caused fights to the death to break out between the 5 organizations known as Group, School, Member, Item, and Block.

But Shiokishi shook the helmet of his powered suit back and forth.

“It is nothing that serious. Basically, I want you to take out some leftovers. It seems some comrades of the former Spark Signal members that attacked the Hula Hoop are still hiding within Academy City. If we do nothing about them, they could easily put together some kind of second plan.”

There were comrades of the people who had wanted information on Dragon from the very depths of Academy City.

“I will send you data on the details of your target, but I think this will be much simpler than with Hula Hoop. …At the very least, you should be able to take them out with no preparation. Since you managed to get through that job before, I’m sure you can easily manage this.”

Shiokishi then started to wrap up the conversation, but Accelerator suddenly spoke.

“…Does the term Dragon sound familiar to you?”

“It’s a fairly famous word. I think it’s used proudly in video game titles a lot.”

“Tch,” he clicked his tongue.

If Shiokishi had said he didn’t know, he could have pressed further, but he had lost the opportunity. If he continued on, Shiokishi would just continue evading the question.

Whether he knew what Accelerator was after or not, Shiokishi tapped his thick metal palms together and then ended the discussion.

“You all are students, so finish up this boring work and get back to your own lives.”

Part 2

The party to celebrate Takitsubo Rikou's release from the hospital was to be held that night.

Hamazura Shiage and Kinuhata Saiai had been forced to make the preparations for that party in a hurry, so they ended up buying various joke goods at a shopping area in District 7.

"…Hey, wait a second. How did we end up in a movie theater and why are we the only ones in the theater 2 minutes before the movie starts?"

"This place specializes in short films, so we're super okay. They show 10 minute long films with 5 minute breaks in between. By my calculations, we can watch two of them and still have super enough time to meet up with Takitsubo-san."

"That doesn't explain why we're the only two here."

"Shut up. I actually need to use the bathroom and am super holding it in, so don't talk to me, Hamazura."

"You want to see it that much?" Hamazura muttered as his shoulders drooped.

Kinuhata's hobby was watching movies, but she seemed to have no interest in major Hollywood hits. She only cared about the ones that were referred to as B or C movies.

"Gwah, this is no good. This film only just started showing, but it has a super shitty feel to it only 2 minutes in…"

"This is always how it is when you bring me along!! You're the one that dragged me in here!!"

Since they were the only two in the theater, Hamazura didn't hold back as he yelled at her.

However, Kinuhata shook her head with a grave look on her face, completely

ignoring Hamazura.

“No, this super isn’t it. I don’t want to see this kind of super self-aware C movie where they decided to make a completely ridiculous C movie for fun. I want to super see something made to super seriously compete with Hollywood, but naturally turned into a C movie due to various circumstances.”

“I see. Well, I can accept that the heroine is wearing a medieval-looking dress despite that fact that the movie takes place in the near future on the grounds that that’s simply the world it takes place in, but I can’t help being bothered by the fact that everyone is sweating as if it were filmed in summer even though the story takes place in the middle of winter.”

“Hamazura, look at the left edge of the screen. You can super see what looks like smokestack from a thermal power station on the opposite shore over there.”

“Seriously? That SF atmosphere they worked so hard to build up is completely gone! I’ve heard of airplanes flying by in the middle of a shot, but a preliminary inspection would make it obvious there was a building there!!”

Even Hamazura, who wasn’t too picky about movies, covered his face with his hands over that one. Meanwhile, Kinuhata started fidgeting and rubbing her thighs together.

“…I can’t do it. I’ve super lost the willpower needed to stay with this horrible film. I’m gonna go to the bathroom. Hopefully, the next short film will be super worth it.”

“Eh? You’re gonna leave this movie to me!?” said Hamazura, but Kinuhata had already left the theater.

He had little choice, so Hamazura watched the strategy meeting just before the climax being shown onscreen. He was watching it more to kill some time than to enjoy the film.

(…Huh? What’s with that map on the wall behind her there?)

Hamazura’s eyes had started to resemble those of a dead fish, but he suddenly started to pay attention again.

(…That's a map of the craters and mountain ranges on Mars. Why isn't it a normal world map? If they went out of their way to get a map like that, then… Waaahhhh!?)

His eyes widened like he had been hit by an electric shock.

(This story takes place in the middle of winter, but not in the middle of Earth's winter!! They were making us think that, but it was actually a story about a modern "what if" world where Mars was developed in an odd way!! In that case, the cast being so hot can be explained as a side effect of the terraforming. And that smokestack wasn't a mistake, it was…Gwahh!! They got me!!)

And the latter 5 minutes of the story were a sight to behold. The dullness of the first half had been intentional on the part of the director. That dullness had made the second half shine even brighter. It was like a glass of cold water after an exhausting marathon.

If that trick had been used in a 100 minute movie, the viewers would have given up, but this was a short film. After the first five minutes, the viewers would tend to reluctantly watch the rest of it even if the beginning was incredibly boring, so they would make it to the second half. That was how calculated that film had been.

(Wow! Wow!! Wooowww!!!!! What is this? This isn't a C film. This was definitely made with the intention of defeating Hollywood!!! What the hell? This was only a 10 minute film, right? This was nothing like the world from some regular, everyday trilogy!! They made this with such depth but also made it so you couldn't tell!)

"Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!!" Hamazura Shiage started laughing without realizing it. He was seriously thinking of kissing Kinuhata Saiai on the back of the leg.

(I see, I see. So this is why seeing low-budget short films made by new directors can be worthwhile.)

Hamazura simply could not keep from smiling at the experience he had just had.

But then a chill ran down his back.

He felt someone's gaze.

He timidly turned around and found the girl who loved movies more than anyone else who had returned from the bathroom.

Her trembling face could be seen peering in through the gap in the slightly opened door. Her expression seemed to be saying, “Nooo!! How could I have missed such an interesting film!?”

After the film was over, Hamazura was walking along next to Kinuhata.

(I see. So the director is called Beverly Seethrough. I need to keep an eye on her stuff…)

Kinuhata was walking along limply as if she had no strength left. She was surrounded by a dark thundercloud-like aura and had an expression as if she felt the world was ending.

“Kinuhata. C’mon, Kinuhata, it’s not so bad. You still win out overall. I never would have come across that film without you. Your antenna that allows you to search out a film like that among the countless films out there is the real deal.”

“…I can’t believe this super Hamazura is feeling sorry for me. With C movies, it’s all about luck. This could be a sign that my sense is starting to become super distorted…”

They exited the movie theater as Kinuhata muttered to herself.

They were on their way back to the hospital to meet up with Takitsubo now that they had killed some time, but then Kinuhata’s cell phone started to ring.

For a short time, Kinuhata did not respond and continued looking on with her dead looking eyes, but she finally answered it with oddly slow movements.

After a short conversation, Kinuhata hung up and looked towards Hamazura.

“Hamazura, go on ahead and super pick up Takitsubo-san. You super know the place, right? If you super take her over to the private salon in District 3, it would be a super help.”

“Ahn?”

“I have a job. The new team is finally being started, so we have to super gather together and then kill all of the former Spark Signal terrorists who are super targeting Academy City.”

Part 3

“…I thought you had gone off to some secret meeting point.”

“…I went off to the secret meeting point and got sick of it in 5 minutes, so I super came back.”

Hamazura and Kinuhata looked at each other as they had this exchange.

Kinuhata had returned before Hamazura had even made it to the hospital. Hamazura started to wonder if there was a transmitter hidden on him somewhere, but it didn’t seem so.

It was past the time all students were supposed to have left school and the last train and last bus had already left, so they were walking to the hospital.

“Hey, so what happened? Weren’t you supposed to go fight some terrorists with this new team?”

“I was, but something happened.”

Kinuhata then started telling him what had happened.

Kinuhata Saiai had gone to a dimly lit underground area and looked around at

the various people waiting there. She had frowned and a well-timed cell phone call had come.

“Thanks for coming, everyone. Item, School, Block, and Member were destroyed a while back. It’s always like that with you people.☆ Anyway, this new team was created from the leftovers, so please get along with your comrades who you tried to kill before!”

“Hey, wait a second! I doubt that!! What kind of memory is that to start with!?”

“I thought it was a joke at first too, but it seems she was super serious. I super couldn’t stand it, so I ran off. Oh, right. The Measure Heart girl in the dress asked me to say hi to you, Hamazura.”

“…Dammit, I have nothing but bad memories of her,” Hamazura said dejectedly, but then he suddenly raised his head. “But wait. Was that really okay? Those people on the phone have a lot of power, right? Will you be okay having ignored one of their orders?”

“It’s super not okay. That’s why I want a bit of help, Hamazura. If I super carry out my assignment before I’m brought back to that new team, they can’t complain.”

“Hah?” said the boy in shock, but Kinuhata continued on readily.

“I want you to super steal a car like normal and help me out. We’ll use it to chase after the former Spark Signal members who were with the group that attacked the Hula Hoop and then super finish them off. We can’t leave Takitsubo-san waiting too long, so let’s finish this off super quickly.”

“Wait just a damn second. Weren’t you just saying that I didn’t have to obey Item anymore? What happened to the Hamazura Shiage who would wash his hands of all that dirty business and support his lovely Takitsubo-chan?”

“Then you can just super leave me be and go with Takitsubo-san to the private salon. She’ll likely be worried about me when I super don’t show up, but you can just super enjoy yourself on your own.”

“Fuck!! This is her party and you’re just going to leave!?”

“If you don’t like it, then super hurry up and get us a car already. Let’s super kill those former Spark Signal bastards and then get to the party, okay? Okay, Hamazura, okay?”

At the end, she started using a sweet, coaxing voice and Hamazura ended up clicking his tongue and sticking his hand in his pocket while half in tears. He pulled out the wire-like tools he used to unlock cars.

While glancing over at Kinuhata who was calling Takitsubo to tell her to head to the private salon in District 3 ahead of them, Hamazura easily opened the door of a family car parked on the street.

“You really are the type that relies on the people you know, aren’t you?”

“Did you super say something, Subordinate Hamazura?”

Part 4

The RV Accelerator, Tsuchimikado Motoharu, Musujime Awaki, and Unabara Mitsuki were riding in headed to District 3 where celebrities tended to gather.

Tsuchimikado displayed the order data Shiokishi had sent over on the large screen.

“There are 20 of them. It seems they have sub-machine guns and grenades prepared for that many, but…well, Shiokishi was right about this being an easy job. It seems their job was mainly to provide support for the main group.”

“Sure, killing them will be easy,” said Accelerator while sitting on a cot and

glaring at Tsuchimikado. “But are we just going to do what those fuckers on the board of directors say? If we play this right, we might be able to press them for some information on Dragon.”

“So are you saying we join the former Spark Signal terrorists, the people who occupied the Hula Hoop and used a child as a hostage for their negotiations?”

“…”

“In our position, we of course do need to search for information on Dragon, but we can’t do it the wrong way. Those former Spark Signal members are just a bunch of terrible bastards. If nothing is done about them, they could easily occupy some other building and take more hostages. …And if you truly want to press for information on the mystery of Dragon by dragging complete strangers into the mix, then the four of us will have to split.”

“Tch,” said Accelerator clicking his tongue disinterestedly.

He was a truly fearsome Level 5 who had even been dropped from a bomber as a strategic weapon, but he truly hated causing damage to civilians (or more accurately, to the peaceful world in which a certain little girl lived).

Now that Accelerator had been silenced, Musujime opened her mouth.

“Where are these remnants of the former Spark Signal members hiding?”

“They’re moving through an underground mall directly below a train station. The place has already closed, so there aren’t any other people there. Since they’re going out of their way to head through there, it must not be too much trouble for them to break through the security.”

Most shopping districts stayed open late into the night, but the ones in the same facility as a train station were different. When the last train left, the underground mall below it would close too.

Tsuchimikado operated a remote control and a map of the underground mall appeared on the screen.

“They most likely know that the main force at the Hula Hoop was defeated. It seems they are moving through the underground mall to get to a vehicle they

have parked elsewhere to move to yet another location. It isn't clear if they are purely attempting to flee or if they are switching to a secondary plan that uses an even more destructive weapon."

"So where is their getaway vehicle located?" asked Unabara, but Tsuchimikado merely pointed towards the wall of the RV.

"There."

"…What?"

"I instructed the driver to circle around ahead of them. If we destroy the vehicle and have someone wait for them, we can prevent things from going the way the former Spark Signal members want it to. …Of course, it won't end there. We will leave an anchor here and the other three will perform a sweep of the underground mall. If we use some pinpoint shooting with Musujime's Move Point and then have Unabara and me take them out while they're confused, this will be over before you know it."

Accelerator frowned upon hearing that.

A faint smile appeared on Tsuchimikado's face when he saw the #1 glaring at him. He lightly tapped his own neck and spoke.

"With the Depart and Hula Hoop battles back-to-back like that, you need to conserve your electrode's battery."

"Tch."

He had no real reason to obey him, but he had no real reason to help them either. Accelerator decided that if those idiots were going to take care of the odd jobs on their own, he would just let them.

At that point, the RV stopped moving.

Tsuchimikado reached his hand out towards the back door that led outside.

"C'mon, let's go. Time for a regular everyday fight to the death."

Part 5

From the standpoint of one's wallet, the underground mall in District 3 was a place that required some courage to step into.

The area the former Spark Signal members were heading through was already closed, so there were no other people there. They were more specifically in an area that had many different sports brands of clothing. They had an entire eras worth of uniforms from a world famous soccer league lined up. People who understood that type of thing could accept how much they cost, but those who did not understand would be at a loss as to why anyone would pay that much. The place was filled with items that had that sort of value.

"(…Oh, there they are. Hm, they have light weight low recoil submachine guns that can be used with one hand, but they've ruined them by putting heavy grenade launchers on them. This might be even easier than expected.)"

"(…Have they not thought about how dangerous it is to use grenades in an enclosed space?)"

While peering around the corner of a corridor, Tsuchimikado and Unabara spoke to each other.

They used a cell phone to call Musujime who was waiting a little ways away.

"The targets have been spotted at Point BBE. Can you confirm?"

"I want to just go ahead and kill them. Could you give me the signal?"

"We'll begin on the count of 5. Start with the outer edges."

Tsuchimikado hung up the phone and gripped his handgun with both hands.

The 20 former Spark Signal terrorists headed towards them through the darkness.

At exactly 5 seconds after he had hung up, a corkscrew pierced the shoulder of one of the armed members making almost no noise.

Musujime Awaki's Move Point made no noise in and of itself. The slight sound that had been made was most likely the sound of the flesh around the wound being spread out by the corkscrew appearing having ignored the third dimension.

A scream resounded through the area.

However, the former Spark Signal group did not realize they were being attacked at first.

A second, a third, and then a fourth corkscrew attacked them.

People on the outer edges of the group simultaneously fell to the ground and writhed around. The former Spark Signal group finally figured out what was going on and stood stock still as they were unsure which direction to run in since people on all sides of them had been hit.

That confused motionlessness lasted only 2 or 3 seconds, but Tsuchimikado did not overlook it.

"Let's go," he said quietly to Unabara and held his gun around the corner.

He unhesitatingly pulled the trigger.

Unlike before, a clear gunshot and muzzle flash was created and more of the terrorists collapsed. Perhaps because this was not a mysterious attack and they were able to comprehend what had happened, the remaining targets returned fire with their submachine guns in Tsuchimikado's direction as they searched for something to hide behind.

Tsuchimikado and Unabara fired from the front and Musujime used her Move Point from a different direction, so the former Spark Signal members continued to go down.

In no time at all, half of them had been taken out.

“(…Oh, shit. A grenade!!)”

Tsuchimikado saw one of them reaching a finger towards the other trigger near the trigger to the submachine gun, so he concentrated his fire there.

However, the former Spark Signal members were good.

All ten of them aimed their grenades towards Tsuchimikado and Unabara in unison. The 10 explosives were fired at once and coffee can-like objects flew through the air in an arc.

“(…Jump!!)” Tsuchimikado yelled as he broke a window on the side of the corridor and jumped through into a store.

But Unabara did not follow.

Instead, he reached for a large button on the wall. It activated a security/fire shutter. When he pressed the button with his palm, a thick metal barrier wall fell down just before the grenades hit.

It stopped the explosives.

A number of large explosions could be heard on the other side of the wall and the shutters became warped in his direction. However, the explosions and fragments did not injure Unabara.

“You dumbass!!” Tsuchimikado yelled at him. “Now we can’t attack them!! Giving them time only lets them gather more firepower for a counterattack!!”

The two of them moved around the shop with the broken window in an attempt to circumvent the shutter and return to the battlefield, but that time lag of a few seconds greatly affected the next turn of events.

A new explosion reverberated through the underground area.

It had not been created in an attempt to attack Tsuchimikado, Musujime, or Unabara.

“!!”

Tsuchimikado hurriedly checked on the state of the passageway and saw that a large hole had been opened in the ceiling on the other side of a cloud of dust. It was in the exact place the former Spark Signal group had previously been. The fallen rubble had piled up like a staircase making a perfect route to the surface.

And the former Spark Signal group had completely vanished.

They had clearly escaped.

“Dammit!!” Tsuchimikado swore as he grabbed his cell phone.

He was calling Accelerator who was waiting on the surface.

“They escaped from the underground mall!! There are about 10 of them! We’ll be heading up with Musujime’s Move Point, but you head out to intercept them!! I doubt they’re still headed there!!”

Part 6

Accelerator could clearly see the explosion even from where he waited.

Something white was floating up into the air, but he wasn’t sure if it was smoke or dust made up of building material. He took his modern cane and headed in that direction when he received even more information.

The asphalt had been blown upwards from below.

A large number of fragments had spread around and had smashed car windshields and restaurant windows to pieces.

A girl was crouched down holding her bleeding head.

He could hear groans and cries from all over the place and the distant sound of an approaching ambulance's siren was mixed in with it all.

The former Spark Signal group seemed to have already fled.

"(…Damn villains.)"

Accelerator looked at the yelling people and at the onlookers who had gathered as he ever so slightly gritted his teeth.

"(…So this is the result when a bunch of piece of shit villains gather together.)"

Tsuchimikado and the others were likely in pursuit of the former Spark Signals, but Accelerator had no intention of just doing what he said. It was upon seeing that scene that he truly started considering shooting the former Spark Signals.

His fingertips slowly approached the switch to the choker-style electrode around his neck, but then he heard an especially loud yell.

A lot of people had been caught up in the sudden incident, but that one stood out among them all. Accelerator looked in that direction without really thinking about it, approached, and saw a high school-aged boy yelling at a rescue worker. It seemed the rescue worker was trying to treat a woman the boy knew, but the student was frantically trying to stop him.

"…?"

The woman looked college-aged or older. The papers that had fallen from her bag looked school related, so she might have been a teacher. She looked more seriously injured than the high school boy who had only a single trail of blood on his forehead. She was slumped over unconscious. Normally, she would need to be treated right away, but…

"Stop!! Stop!! Don't use that medicine!! You can't!! It'll just have the opposite effect!!"

"But if she doesn't get something to give her some strength, she won't make it to the hospital! Do you know what her heart rate is!? I already checked, and she showed no allergic reaction to this drug. Why are you trying to stop me from treating her!?"

Both the high school boy and the rescue worker were getting worked up.

“…You just can’t,” the boy clinging to the rescue worker’s arm finally said as if he were squeezing out the words. “She’s…pregnant.”

With that last word, the rescue worker’s expression turned to one of shock. There was no need to ask for the details regarding that situation.

The high school boy averted his gaze and desperately moved his trembling lips.

“I’ve heard that drugs that normal people have no issue with can have a negative effect on a fetus. What about that one? Will it really be okay? What if that kills it!?”

“W-well…”

It was a delicate situation. The drug had been developed on the assumption that it would not be used on infants or pregnant women, so no tests had ever been run. Not even a professional rescue worker like him knew what to do when it actually came down to it.

“I’ll be honest. When I first heard that she was pregnant, I thought my life was over. I didn’t know what to do. I just wished the problem could disappear… actually, I still feel that way. I still wonder why things ended up this way.” The high school boy bit his lip. “We were walking along here on what I suppose could be called a date. It was mostly to calm me down from the panic I was in. I just couldn’t figure out what to do. But this isn’t what I wanted. Is it really going to end like this? What do I want to do? Did I want to leave her? Then why am I clinging to her like this…?”

After saying that much, he fell silent.

Finally, he desperately moved his lips, speaking quietly in a cracking voice.

“I don’t want to lose them…”

As the high school boy trembled, tears welled up in his eyes and he used all his strength to yell.

“Even if I decided in this direction, this isn’t how I would have wanted it!! I still

have no idea what I want to do, but I can’t let it end like this!! Please, do something!! You’re an expert at saving people’s lives, right!? So please save both of them!!”

The rescue worker seemed a bit flustered.

However, no matter how much he thought about it, there was only one thing he could do.

One path would likely save neither and the other would certainly save one.

As a professional, he knew which one he had to choose.

“…Let me use this. If I don’t, the mother will die, too!!”

“But…!!”

As they once again reached their stalemate, they both heard the sound of a cane striking the ground.

It was Accelerator.

“Out of the way.”

“Hah…? W-wait a second! Outsiders shouldn’t do anythi—!!”

Accelerator knocked the rescue worker aside without even waiting for him to finish speaking and moved to the spot the man had previously been in. He leaned over and reached a hand up to the switch of his choker electrode. He then lightly reached a hand towards the pregnant woman’s belly.

He had once calculated back from the electrical signals on the surface of the skin in order to completely rewrite the structure of a small girl’s brain so he could save her.

It was not difficult for him to gather accurate information on the fetus by touching the pregnant woman’s belly.

(…Gender: Female. Weight: 244 grams. Nutrition Supply Level: 3825. Consciousness Operation Rate: 3.8. Heart Rate: 60. Stimulus Reaction Rate:

5.52. Cell Division: 88…)

After only a few seconds with his eyes shut, Accelerator returned the electrode's switch to normal.

He spoke to the rescue worker who had fallen to the ground.

"Give her the drug. Give her 2.5 grams of ectrin. Put a surface chip over her carotid artery and inject it inside her over five 10 second periods with 20 second breaks in between. That will do it."

"Wait!!" The one objecting was the high school boy not the rescue worker. "What will happen to the fetus!?"

"That's what I was fucking calculating, you piece of shit!!" Accelerator yelled back and the boy fell silent.

The #1 continued on.

"If you truly don't want them to die, then do as I say. If you do that, it won't have any negative effects on the mother or the fetus. You don't want them both to die while you argue, do you?"

Having said what he had to say, Accelerator turned towards the rescue worker without waiting for the boy to respond.

"If you're gonna do it, you only have 5 minutes to decide. You want to save both if you can, right? Then try my way. You'll still be using the same drug. Do you really have any reason not to do it?"

The rescue worker shook his head and pulled a chip that looked like a stick of gum out of his kit. As Accelerator told him, he put the chip on her neck for a short time, pulled it off, and then continued to repeat the action.

And once he had done it 5 times like Accelerator had said…

"…Uuh…"

At first, the high school boy did not know who had made that small groan.

When the woman who had been unconscious up until that point opened her eyes, it truly looked like the boy was going to collapse to the ground.

“…It had no effect on the fetus. Doesn’t look like there was any change to its cell division rate. Just take her to the hospital like this,” Accelerator said to the rescue worker after having briefly flipped on the electrode and used his fingertips to check.

“But don’t take her to the District 3 hospital. Take her to District 7 instead. It’s a bit farther away, but that hospital definitely won’t try to avoid dealing with her. With a delicate patient like her, not all places you take her will accept her. Taking her somewhere you know will take her will be quicker overall.”

Accelerator then turned his back on them.

He couldn’t stay there forever. To make sure the same thing didn’t happen again, he had to take out the fleeing former Spark Signals.

And then…

“Hey!! Wait a second! Hey!!”

It was the high school student. He was yelling after Accelerator who stopped in place but did not turn around.

The boy desperately spoke to Accelerator’s back.

“Thank you. If you hadn’t done something there, I definitely would have lived the rest of my life as an empty shell.”

“...Fuck off,” Accelerator muttered, but it seemed the boy hadn’t heard him.

He continued to speak.

“I won’t forget what you did for me. I will never forget that you saved something more important to me than my own life!! If you ever need something from me, I can try to pay you back. So…”

The boy’s words trailed off.

He did so because of a sharp noise and a dull shock on his cheek.

He wasn't quite sure what had happened and then he noticed something black and hard pressed up against his forehead. It was a small handgun. Accelerator had pulled the gun from his belt, lightly struck the boy on the cheek with the grip, and then stuck the barrel up against his forehead. It seemed this was going to cause another uproar, but the #1 didn't seem to care.

He repeated his two words from before.

"Fuck off."

For a bit, the high school boy was unable to speak and he took a few steps back. Finally, he bowed deeply in thanks to Accelerator. He then turned his back and ran towards the ambulance the woman he knew had been loaded onto.

After the ambulance drove off, Accelerator put the handgun back in his belt and slowly looked around the area.

"…"

He muttered something.

However, what he said did not reach anyone's ears.

Finally, he reached a slender finger up towards the electrode's switch.

An explosive noise rang out.

The injured and the onlookers at the scene did not see Accelerator after that.

All that was left was a new large crack running across the asphalt that seemed to indicate the fury of a monster.

Part 7

Hamazura Shiage was driving the (stolen) family car from District 7 to District 3. He was on an overhead bypass road. He was supposed to be chasing after the terrorists to help out Kinuhata, but…

“Hey, what the fuck!? What the hell is that chasing us!?”

With a look of shock, Hamazura checked the rearview mirror and then turned his head around to get a better look.

His reaction wasn’t too surprising.

“That’s an HsAFH-11 ‘Six Wings’. …It’s an unmanned attack helicopter,” said Kinuhata with a look of light irritation one would usually associate with getting caught in traffic.

The military helicopter reminded Hamazura of an Apache and it looked like it had a wing with missiles on it sticking out on the left and right. But that wasn’t quite accurate. The wings split into three each forming six wings that moved around like the joints in a human arm as they aimed.

All six wings were aimed at the family car Hamazura was driving.

As Hamazura looked in the mirror at the helicopter that was flying at low altitude and matching their speed, he gave a loud gulp.

“Fuck this!! All I did was steal a car to help you out! Does that usually turn out this badly!?”

“Does that look like an Anti-Skill toy, Hamazura!? It super isn’t!!”

“Then what is it? Is this a counterattack by the terrorists you’re after? Do the terrorists have weapons like this!?”

“No, the Six Wings is an unmanned weapon belonging to Academy City’s air defense unit. They super wouldn’t send this out for just a criminal!”

“So this is Academy City doing this!? And high up in the city at that!? I can only think of one reason why this is happening and that’s the fact that you ignored the order you got on the phone!!”

“…Hmm. I think you might be jumping to a hasty conclusion.”

“Why are you so relaxed!? Do you understand the situation here!? Do you know how fast a military helicopter can fly!?”

“Hm? That’s a super HsAFH-11, so its maximum speed is around 3000 kph.”

“Mach 2.5!? Is that thing really a helicopter!?”

“It super can’t use its rocket engines when its wings are spread out like that because the wind pressure would super damage its joints. Right now, it can only go about 3 or 4 hundred kph.”

“Either way, we’re kinda fucked with only this family car!!”

The Six Wings had perfectly matched its movements to those of the family car, so it looked frozen in place in the mirror. …Hamazura didn’t know the details, but it seemed to have locked onto them.

“What do we do!? If that thing shoots a missile, it’s all over!!”

“We just need to pray it uses a short range anti-armored vehicle missile,” was the ridiculous-sounding thing Kinuhata said as she bent over as if she were tying her shoes.

“I don’t see how that makes much of a difference!!”

“It does,” said Kinuhata as she straightened back up. “It seems the Six Wings super uses an SRM21 for a short range anti-armored vehicle missile. It super uses an infrared sensor to get a lock.”

“And!? Whether it uses a very high frequency radar, infrared rays, or ultraviolet rays, we still can’t get away from it!! Do you know how fast a missile moves!?”

“Here, super breathe in some of this smokescreen and calm down.”

“Cough cough!? A-a smoke grenade!! Don’t activate that thing in the car!!”

“Are you sure? Using it this way can be super useful,” Kinuhata said nonchalantly as she threw the smoke grenade out the passenger side window.

Immediately afterwards, a comparatively short missile was fired from one of the Six Wings' arm-like wings.

Hamazura thought his heart was going to stop, but the missile did not strike the family car's exhaust pipe blowing the car away.

They avoided that fate due to the smoke grenade.

The dummy heat source had made the short range missile to veer off course.

"That's super what you call a flare," Kinuhata said smoothly, but the threat was not over.

With a loud boom, the missile exploded on the road surface where the smoke grenade had landed. They had avoided a direct hit, but the intense explosive wind created assaulted the family car. The car's windows shattered and the car itself trembled unnaturally. Hamazura desperately tried to bring the car's spin under control.

Meanwhile, the Six Wings continued to follow the family car as the wind from its rotor blew away the smoke caused by the explosion.

Even though Hamazura could just floor it because there were almost no other cars on the road, the family car just didn't have enough speed to outrun the attack helicopter.

"What do we do? I'm pretty sure you only had one smoke grenade and it'll probably decide to switch over to its machine gun meaning we can't use any kind of flare defense again."

"Hamazura, turn super left at the next branch in the road."

"Hah? Eh? What are you saying? I can't hear you over the wind."

"Fnhh!!"

Kinuhata said nothing more and instead suddenly grabbed the hand brake from the passenger seat.

The family car suddenly decelerated and slid to the side as if it were drifting.

Having suddenly started to move diagonally, the car shot into the left branch of the road.

“Waaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!?”

Hamazura frantically put the hand brake back to normal and turned the wheel. Hitting the brake would definitely have put them in a spin, so he just used the steering wheel to bring the car back from the vector it was drifting in without decelerating.

“What the hell was that for!?”

“I super want us to survive this. Hamazura, head straight through this main road. It’s a super large road with 3 lanes on either side, but just head super straight without even changing lanes if you can help it.”

“Have I gotten involved in something dangerous again without realizing it?”

“Isn’t that super normal for you? Anyway, just head super straight.”

“Is this really okay? I know it won’t actually save us, but wouldn’t it be better to zigzag back and forth to throw off its aim?”

As he complained, Hamazura drove the family car as instructed. He looked around while stepping on the gas. The area had a lot of skyscrapers, so the Six Wings chasing after them would naturally head in a straight line. It looked like the helicopter would hit a wall if it tried to move around much.

And on top of that, there were occasional signs on the sides of buildings and other overhead roads crossing above theirs. This meant that the Six Wings would have to lower its altitude while chasing the family car. It was now flying just a bit off the ground almost at the car’s level.

“Hey, Kinuhata, is this…Bfh!?”

Hamazura looked over towards the passenger seat and then did what would have been a spit take had he been drinking something.

Kinuhata Saiai was leaning forward out the passenger side window. In fact, everything but her legs was sticking out the window. Her slender legs were

wrapped around the seat to hold herself in place as she pointed a handgun back behind the car.

However, the fast-moving car was naturally creating quite a bit of wind.

“W-wow!! Wow!! Those panties!! Kinuhata, this goes well beyond the level of just a panty shot!! Your panties!! What are you going to do about your panties!?”

Kinuhata then shot a bullet through the car into the driver side door.

“…Do super nothing other than looking forward and focusing on driving!”

“Yes!! But your panties!!”

Kinuhata ignored Hamazura who was getting all worked up over something weird and went back to aiming the handgun behind the family car. As if in response, the barrel of the Six Wings’ machine gun started to move.

“Kinuhata, this is impossible!! Maybe if you had some kind of antiaircraft gun, but a tiny little 9 mm isn’t going to get through a military helicopter’s armor!!”

“…The bullets I’m super using are made to be destroyed easily. They’re made of something like papier-mâché so they will super smash to pieces. They’re meant to be used in small areas where a ricocheting bullet could super hurt an ally.”

“Then that’s even worse for attacking armor!!”

“Who said I was shooting at its armor?” Kinuhata muttered out of annoyance. “I’m super shooting at the engine’s air intake.”

Multiple gun shots rang out. The bullets seemed to be almost sucked into the small hole below the helicopter rotor.

Just like a car, a helicopter had its fuel react with the air to create energy, so they needed a hole to suck in air. If a foreign object was brought in there, the engine would stall causing the helicopter to crash.

However, a few countermeasures were used in normal air intakes to prevent that kind of trouble. The downward wind created by the rotor prevented dust and sand from getting in and a wire mesh was usually put over it to prevent foreign

materials from getting in. Something as big as 9 mm would not be sucked in.

But Kinuhata Saiai had used bullets made of a papier-mâché-like material so they would break to pieces as soon as it hit its target instead of ricocheting.

Yes, it broke to pieces just like dried papier-mâché being broken.

The created particles were even finer than normal dust, so the extremely narrow openings in the wire mesh over the air intake were large enough for them to get through. And once the foreign substance was within the engine, the engine burnt out and failed to work properly. The Six Wings lost a good bit of its lift.

With an explosive noise, black smoke started to rise from the helicopter’s engine.

Just as the Six Wings started to veer slightly from the road, it started scraping across the asphalt.

That helicopter was loaded with fuel for the rotor, special fuel for the rocket engine, missiles, and ammunition for its machine guns as it crashed.

“Yes!! I super got him!!”

Kinuhata almost seemed to slither back into the passenger seat like a snake, but Hamazura had more important things to focus on.

A giant shockwave struck the family car that made the previous one from the short range missile seem like nothing. He lost control of the steering wheel almost instantly and the car finally entered a true spin.

“Dammit!! Kinuhata! Use your Offense Armor!! If you can stop a shot from a sniper rifle, you can do something about this, right!?”

“Wait, Hamazura—!!” Kinuhata said as if protesting something, but he didn’t have time to listen.

The family car struck the side wall of the road.

“Kh…”

Hamazura’s consciousness cut out and he eventually came to and sat up. His body had been thrown out of the car, but it seemed he had escaped any difficulties by hitting a balloon made of synthetic fiber that was filled with a large amount of water. They were lined up on the side of the road to soften the blow of any accidents.

(Where’s Kinuhata…?)

Hamazura looked around and towards the crashed family car, but he didn’t see her. He actually didn’t know how long he had been unconscious, so he assumed she had come to before him. Perhaps she had been unable to find him and had gone off to take care of the terrorists on her own.

(Things can never be easy, can they?)

He stood up and checked his arms and legs, but none of them seemed to be broken.

From a sign he could see, it seemed they had entered District 3 while being chased by the helicopter.

He started wondering whether he should find Kinuhata and continue helping her or go meet up with Takitsubo, but it became a moot point.

His cell phone started to ring.

It was a suspicious call that withheld its number, but Hamazura had a general idea what kind of person was calling at a time like that.

“Hello, it’s been a while. If I told you I was Measure Heart, would that be enough for you to at least remember what I look like?”

“…Why do you know my number?”

“Do you want me to explain every little thing? That would be a real pain, so I won’t. More importantly, I have a question for you: Is Kinuhata Saiai with you? I’ve been trying to call her, but I can’t get a hold of her.”

“…”

Hamazura Shiage looked over at the crashed Six Wings.

“So that was yours.”

“?”

He heard an odd breath rather than words.

She seemed to be surprised about something.

“I’m not sure what you’re talking about, but I’ll tell you something if you’re in contact with Kinuhata. If she’s going to do this on her own, we’ll leave her alone, but the former Spark Signal terrorists have taken over a private salon in District 3. Of course, if she’s going to give up, we would be glad to take care of it.”

“A private salon…in District 3…?” Hamazura muttered in what was almost a moan.

Wasn’t that where Takitsubo Rikou was waiting for them having just left the hospital?

Part 8

Hamazura Shiage ran through District 3 at night.

He repeatedly prayed that it wasn't true, but the situation was quite severe.

Anti-Skill was surrounding the skyscraper Takitsubo was supposed to be in, so he couldn't even get inside. The yellow tape marking off the area hit Hamazura's heart as a danger signal.

He heard a loud, dry noise coming from the upper levels of the building that sounded like a gunshot.

After he heard that, Hamazura Shiage took a deep breath and made up his mind.

The terrorists had taken over the private salon building.

Takitsubo Rikou most likely could not escape.

In that case, what he had to do was clear.

"God damn it…" Hamazura muttered because he didn't really want to have anything to do with the incident.

He then started repeating the same curse growing louder and louder.

"God damn it! God damn it!! God damn it!!!!! Why? Why here of all places!? There are tons of other buildings! Why the hell did they have to choose this one!?"

As he yelled, he turned his back on the private salon. He looked around and spotted an unnaturally placed garbage truck. He unhesitatingly approached it, forced open the passenger side door, and climbed in.

The driver was shocked.

"Waahh!? What the-..!? Are you trying to rob me!?"

“Let’s cut the crap. You’re a subordinate in the underworld like me, right?” Hamazura asked in a low voice as he stuck one hand in his pocket.

The garbage man in a work uniform’s face stiffened and Hamazura continued on.

“I’m sure you can tell from my face that I’m making some preparations for helping out my boss. …Hand over your backup gun. Of course, I could always just kill you and take it.”

Rationally speaking, someone with a weapon wouldn’t demand a weapon from someone else, but the garbage man hadn’t realized that. He pulled out a cheap-looking bag and handed a small handgun and a few extra magazines that were inside to Hamazura.

“Wh-where exactly are you assigned? If you need a weapon, can’t you just go through the proper procedure…?”

The man assumed wrong, but Hamazura just averted his gaze.

What was he doing?

Hamazura Shiage was just a Level 0. He didn’t have any kind of special power at his disposal to defeat an incoming enemy like Kinuhata Saiai had. He was weak enough that he could easily be killed in a street fight with delinquents if he wasn’t careful.

“I’m not assigned anywhere. I’ve already retired,” he muttered after thinking for a bit.

Despite being weak, Hamazura knew that the world was not a kind place. A delinquent leader like Komaba Ritoku had been killed so easily. He didn’t want to think about it, but Takitsubo Rikou was most likely the same. That was why Hamazura took that weapon. It had nothing to do with whether he was a Level 0 or not.

“…But someone I know seems to be trapped in that building, so I have to go.”

Having said what he had to say, Hamazura got out of the garbage truck.

He had a gun now, but he still couldn’t just charge into the private salon

building. He would clearly be captured by Anti-Skill if he tried.

(…They've got it covered all the way around with no blind spots. Anti-Skill isn't stupid enough to leave a route for the criminals to escape. But that also means they haven't left a route for me to get in through.)

Hamazura then looked up into the starry sky.

(…If I can't get in on the ground, I'll have to go through the sky.)

Hamazura Shiage had been attacked by a helicopter just a few minutes prior.

He looked around and then entered a large hotel that was nearby. He used the elevator to get to the roof and, just as he had expected, he found a heliport there. A small helicopter with a round egg-shaped body was stopped there. It was most likely waiting for a guest that wanted to enjoy the nighttime scenery.

Hamazura headed straight for the helicopter and opened the door.

Hamazura spoke as he pointed his handgun at the female pilot who was running through a systems check.

"Sorry, but I'm gonna need you to take me to the private salon three roads down."

The female pilot who had the barrel of a gun pointed at her head remained silent for a few seconds.

Finally, she spoke without removing her headset.

"…Unfortunately, even someone like me used to belong to the agency that administers Academy City's air defense."

As she whispered, Hamazura frowned and then realized something.

At some point, she had gotten a utility knife into her hand.

"Did you think a pilot wouldn't know how to use a weapon? Since we might crash in enemy territory and be forced to act on our own, we have things much harsher than an army soldier who acts in a large group with plenty of weaponry."

(…Wait a second. When did she bring that out?)

When he had gotten into the cockpit, both of her hands had been busy checking over the displays. At some point she had taken out that knife that had been hidden somewhere. He knew that much, but he couldn't fully understand what had happened.

She was too dangerous to take his eyes off of.

He may have a handgun, but he was still the one with a chill running down his back.

That was when the cell phone in Hamazura Shiage's pocket suddenly started to ring. He frowned at the timing. In contrast, the female pilot continued to sit in her seat while a thin smile appeared on her face.

"…Don't you need to answer that? We haven't taken off yet, so you're free to do so," she said in a provoking manner.

"…"

Without moving his head, Hamazura used the hand not holding the gun to slowly grab the cell phone from his pocket. He did this so carefully that it took him 30 seconds. The instant he looked down to check the screen was the most terrifying, but he immediately hit the connect button and put the phone to his ear upon seeing the displayed name.

"…Hama…zura…"

"Takitsubo, are you okay!? Where are you!?"

"…At the meeting point. The private salon…"

Hamazura looked slightly relieved to hear that lovely voice, but the relief disappeared replaced by burning doubt.

(Wait a second. Why does her voice sound so weak?)

"I heard what happened. Terrorists have entered the private salon. Are you okay? You weren't hit by a stray bullet, were you!?"

“I’m…fine…”

At the very end of her sentence, he heard a gunshot over the phone. He then heard what sounded like rushed footsteps.

“Takitsubo!!”

“I’m fine…really… I’m hiding right now… They haven’t noticed me yet.”

He heard a small noise over the phone.

It was the sound of someone leaning up against a wall.

“Wait. Then why do you sound so exhausted!?”

“I’m just…not feeling too good. It’s nothing you need to worry about, Hamazura…”

“Dammit!!” he swore.

Takitsubo Rikou had only just been released from the hospital. She may have been fine with a normal life, but that kind of heavy activity and intense mental strain would put a toll on her body. And her health had originally taken a turn for the worse because of some rare and not fully understood material called Body Crystal. No one knew just how much damage had actually accumulated within her.

“Hamazura…”

“Okay, don’t worry. I’m telling you that it’ll be fine. I’ll be there right away. I’ll definitely be there to rescue you. So just bear with it a little longer. Can you do that?”

“No, not that.”

Hamazura had been frantically moving his lips, but Takitsubo’s reaction was the exact opposite.

“Don’t come, Hamazura. Don’t come here. There are 10 terrorists. They all seem to be armed with submachine guns and grenade launchers. Hamazura, you may

know how to use a handgun, but you don’t know how to use a rifle, do you? If you come in here, they will just concentrate their fire on you. You can’t do anything about it, Hamazura. So don’t come.”

“…Fuck that…” Hamazura muttered as he trembled.

This trembling was different from before. It was due to anger instead of fear.

“I’m going. Of course I’m going!! I can’t just leave you there! No matter what it takes, I will rescue you from there. So wait for me. Don’t give up!! Whether I’m out of my league here or not, I’m going!!”

Takitsubo did not respond.

Perhaps because the cell phone relay antenna within the private salon had been destroyed, the call ended. Hamazura stared at the disconnected cell phone for a bit and his trembling reached its maximum. A shout exploded from the bottom of his throat.

The female pilot sitting in the cockpit looked at him and her eyebrows moved slightly.

The pilot was still playing with the knife in her hand that she could attack with at any time while Hamazura continued to point the hand gun towards her with trembling hands.

“Please…” he said to her with tears and snot running down his face. “You can charge me with whatever crime you want. I won’t complain if you send me down to the very depths of hell. But please help me save her…”

Those words that sounded as if he were just barely squeezing them out resounded within the helicopter.

After a few seconds of silence, the female pilot finally sighed. She then spoke in a voice that could barely be heard.

“…Why didn’t you say that sooner?”

“?”

Hamazura hadn’t been able to quite hear her and he looked on questioningly, but then a loud roar pierced his ears. It was the sound of the helicopter’s rotor quickly raising its rotation speed. He looked up in the direction of the noise and realized the feeling at his feet had disappeared. The craft was hovering.

The female pilot threw the utility knife aside and grabbed a half-empty can of coffee. She hit a few buttons on a number pad and a small door-like object near the joystick opened up. She then poured the coffee inside.

(…The flight recorder…?)

It was the device that recorded what happened within the craft so that the reason for a crash could be investigated. Pouring coffee inside the armor that protected it from fire, water, and shocks would erase the conversations that had taken place inside the helicopter. That included the one that had recorded who Hamazura and Takitsubo were.

The female pilot raised the helicopters altitude as she spoke into her headset’s mic without looking at Hamazura.

“Flight H3389 is being hijacked. Repeat, Flight H3389 is being hijacked!! The hijacker has a handgun and a small drum with liquid inside. It probably holds 8 to 10 liters! If what he says is true, the drum contains a liquid explosive and he is threatening to scatter the contents along with an ignition device down from midair if his instructions are not followed. I am giving priority to the lives of the people in the area, so I am following his orders for now!!”

The panicked male voice of an air-traffic controller responded over her headset. In response to that, the pilot started speaking some sort of code.

“T-A, T-A. Code black. Flying in direction 202 and altitude 80, give me authorization! B-A-L, at intervals of 35 to 40. Large. I’m going, understood!?”

At first, Hamazura had thought that had simply been aviation radio jargon, but when he thought through it again, he realized it didn’t actually mean anything. She had been listing off the characteristics of the hijacker. She had most likely been saying the hijacker was aged between 35 to 40, was 202 cm tall, weighed around 80 kg, and had black skin.

Of course, none of those characteristics matched Hamazura.

The pilot spoke to him once she had completely cut off the transmission.

“…Flying on some kid’s whim isn’t so easy. Sorry, but I had to make that pretty showy.”

“You…”

Hamazura wasn’t quite sure what to say as the helicopter continued on. The private salon building was only 3 roads away from the hotel. They would be there in no time.

The building was just as luxurious as the hotel had been.

He could see a few figures on the lit up heliport. They were not customers wanting to be rescued. They had submachine guns in their hands.

Tension grabbed at Hamazura’s heart, but they did not shoot at the helicopter flying above them.

Hamazura looked confused.

“What’s going on?”

“…I don’t know who they’ve contacted, but I bet one of their demands was to be given a means of escape. They may have mistaken our helicopter for the one they requested.”

The female pilot circled around the private salon building.

“But that doesn’t change the fact that they’re on their guard. We can’t exactly land at the heliport if you don’t want this helicopter to be taken by the terrorists.”

“I know, and I don’t intend to cause that much trouble for you.” Hamazura looked down at the heliport below and pointed at a certain spot. “What’s that?”

“…An imitation tree. To put it simply, a number of layers of white cloth like a yacht’s sail are formed into the shape of a tree and various colors of lights are put on as decorations. If a normal tree were there, the branches broken off by the wind would create issues when landing or taking off.”

“I see.”

Hamazura thought for a bit.

Then he unhesitatingly opened the helicopter’s door.

“Thanks for the info.”

“!?”

That caught even the female pilot by surprise.

Hamazura Shiage then jumped out into the night sky.

They were around 20 meters above the heliport. Gravity slammed Hamazura into the tree made of cloth. The yacht sail-like decoration snapped, but it absorbed enough of the shock for Hamazura to avoid receiving a fatal injury when he landed on the heliport.

At first, the three terrorists armed with submachine guns and grenade launchers merely stared on in shock. After all, some strange guy had jumped down out of the helicopter they thought had come in accordance with their demands.

And Hamazura did not wait for them to retain their composure.

He mercilessly pointed his handgun forward and repeatedly pulled the trigger.

Multiple gunshots rang out and the terrorists were taken out before they could manage to fire back.

Hamazura waved once at the helicopter circling around above signaling for it to leave the area. Then he moved his gaze to the door leading inside the building.

His lips moved slightly.

“…I’ve come here to the depths of hell, partner.”

Most likely, Hamazura Shiage himself had not noticed.

It was true that he was a good-for-nothing third-rate thug. There was no twist ending coming where it turned out he actually possessed some special power or

talent. He was exactly what he looked like: a pathetic Level 0.

However, when he put his life on the line to protect a certain girl, he became a true protagonist.

Part 9

The former Spark Signal terrorists who had control of the private salon building raised their heads.

They had heard gunshots.

And the gunshots sounded different from the guns they carried. The caliber was probably the same, but the powder being used was different.

“A group went up to the roof to see if the helicopter we had requested had come, but…”

“When is Stephanie going to meet up with us? Depending on what she does...”

“Maybe we should take an attack from an esper with teleportation powers into account.”

However, they were not so simple as to all head straight for the source of the noise. They had mostly suppressed the people within the building, but there was a bare minimum of people they needed to seal their movements.

There was also the risk that the gunshots themselves were a trap and they would trigger some explosives upon heading that way.

The 7 former Spark Signals immediately thought through all that and split into 3 teams.

They had made the decision and reacted very quickly.

However, a “disaster” ignored that and suddenly attacked regardless.

That “disaster” came in through the window.

An explosion that sounded like the main gun of a battleship resounded throughout the room and the window through which a piece of the night scenery could be seen shattered. However, it was not a mass of firepower that flew inside.

It was a person.

The person had white hair, red eyes, and a smile that looked like a rip in his face.

He was Accelerator, Academy City’s strongest Level 5.

(…Th-this is the 28th floor…!?)

In the face of such an unusual phenomenon, one of the former Spark Signals had that commonplace thought. Yet even that small lag was fatal before Accelerator.

The action the Level 5 took was simple.

He grabbed the closest former Spark Signal terrorist with one hand and threw him at the others. The action was much like one a child in a temper tantrum would take, but when the ability to alter all kinds of vectors was added in, it possessed the destructive power of an explosive shell.

With an explosive noise, three former Spark Signals were blown away.

Without even waiting to hear the sound of ripping flesh and snapping bones, Accelerator turned his red eyes to his next target.

The remaining former Spark Signal terrorists finally jumped behind cover and started firing their submachine guns.

But gunshots began to resound from an unexpected place.

“…”

The gunshots had come from that floor's exit. The terrorists had been so distracted by Accelerator that they had been unable to react. They collapsed to the ground spreading their blood across the floor. Each target had been accurately hit by a single bullet either in the head or the center of the abdomen. They had clearly died instantly. It had been so sudden that not a single one gave out a death scream.

Accelerator turned in the direction of the gunshots.

An unfamiliar man wearing a suit stood there. He looked to be around 30. As his handgun had smoke rising from it, it was clear he had been the one to shoot the former Spark Signal group.

"Who are you?"

"Does it really matter?" the man in the suit said.

The man then aimed his handgun to the side towards the terrorists Accelerator had knocked away with his vector power. He carefully shot each of them either in the head or the abdomen. The gunshots were louder than one would expect for the size of the handgun. Most likely, it was not a standard 9mm. It used bullets of a higher caliber.

The man in the suit spoke to Accelerator as he swapped out magazines.

"If you truly want to protect this city, you must be this thorough."

"I asked who the hell you are. Do you want to die here?"

"I am Sugitani," the man said in an offhand manner without his expression changing.

He kicked each body over to see if they reacted in any way.

"Pray that we do not meet again. You need to work towards that end."

Saying only that, the man in the suit put away his handgun and headed for the floor's exit. Accelerator glared at his disappearing back and finally switched his electrode back to normal mode. Whatever the details were, the danger had left the private salon at least temporarily.

Accelerator pulled out his cell phone.

It pissed him off to ask for help from the people who had fucked things up, but it would be a pain to deal with it all himself.

"…Hey, Tsuchimikado. I took out the bastards you let escape to the private salon building. Get up here already and deal with the injured and check for traps. If you can't even do that, I really will put a bullet in your head."

He put away his phone and walked out along the floor.

He opened a door and saw a large party area inside. Civilians that appeared to have been hostages were gathered in it. His initial glance told him there were more than 300 of them in there. Eerie sobs leaked out from various directions, but it didn't feel like the atmosphere of a group in which there had been fatalities.

He then heard a clattering noise from a different direction.

Accelerator had been about to enter the large area, but he stopped. He walked down the hall with his modern cane and saw something roll out from behind a pillar.

It was a high school-aged girl wearing a pink track suit.

All strength seemed to have left her body and she was sweating profusely. Accelerator was reminded of Last Order when her personality had been desecrated by a virus.

The girl in the track suit's consciousness seemed dim, and she slowly opened and closed her eyes. Even when she saw Accelerator approaching, she did not attempt to stand up.

Accelerator knelt down to check on her condition and his eyebrows shot up slightly.

(…She has no obvious injury. It doesn't look like she was shot. Is she sick or something? Don't tell me she's pregnant, too.)

Accelerator decided he should at least bring her to the hospital, so he pulled out

his cell phone.

And then…

"…What the hell did you do?" said a low male voice.

Accelerator immediately looked over and saw a boy walking from further down the hallway.

He, Hamazura Shiage, was glaring at the limp, unmoving girl in the track suit and Accelerator while he forced out some words.

"I asked you what the hell you did to Takitsubo!"

Part 10

Hamazura had lost his cool.

When he had snuck into the private salon building from the roof, he hadn't been stupid enough to take the elevator. He had headed down floor by floor via the emergency stairs, but even that was pretty much a straight shot. If he ran across the terrorists, he would not be able to avoid a firefight in which he would have the disadvantage.

Hamazura had been continuing down while extremely nervous and then he had heard numerous gunshots upon arriving at a certain floor. He then ran down to the 28th floor and that was where he had witnessed it.

Academy City's strongest Level 5, Accelerator, was crouched down next to the unconscious form of Takitsubo Rikou looking like he was about to do something to her.

It was possible that a third party may have interpreted Accelerator's actions as an attempt to help her.

However, Hamazura was unable to see it that way.

The reason was quite simple.

Hamazura Shiage had once belonged to a delinquent group called Skill-Out. At that time, the group's leader had been Komaba Ritoku, but the higher ups of Academy City had determined that Skill-Out was disadvantageous to the city.

That decision had led to Accelerator being dispatched.

Skill-Out's leader, Komaba Ritoku, had been killed and the group had temporarily been driven to the edge of destruction.

"…So this was your doing, too?"

That person, that dog of Academy City, had appeared before Hamazura again and was trying to do something to Takitsubo Rikou.

"Were you the leader and sole survivor of those terrorists? Or did you kill your other comrades yourself? Either way, you're doing dirty jobs secretly in the darkness."

As Hamazura had just previously been attacked by one of Academy City's Six Wings, he naturally came to that conclusion.

"When Skill-Out was destroyed, things weren't exactly going well for us. Leader Komaba made up his mind and challenged you to a final battle, so I won't say anything about that. I want to say something so badly, but I won't for his sake."

Most likely, a third party would have been unable to understand his words.

But Hamazura wasn't saying them because he wanted to be understood.

His mouth was merely moving on its own.

"But if you're going to try to take something else I care about away from me… If you're going to take Takitsubo's life, the life of someone who hasn't made up

her mind to fight and who is supposed to live a normal life from now on…”

He was shaking.

Paying no heed to the tiny distinction between Level 0 and Level 5, Hamazura Shiage aimed his handgun at Accelerator in order to protect that girl who couldn’t move.

“Prepare yourself, strongeee

His former leader, Komaba Ritoku, had inspected Accelerator's actions and investigated his characteristics. This had led him to the answer that electromagnetic interference would temporarily seal his powers.

In that case…

(…I need to make that choker malfunction. But how!? Leader Komaba used chaff to jam the signal, but…!!)

He knew generally what he had to do, but he didn't know specifically how to do it.

As he thought, Accelerator spun his body swinging a clenched fist.

His arm was rumored to be able to kill someone just by touching them.

"…!!!???"

Hamazura immediately swung his body to the side in an attempt to evade.

Accelerator's arm did not actually make contact.

However, an explosive wind of unknown origin appeared and blew Hamazura away. He flew more than 2 meters through the air before slamming into the hallway wall. Unnatural strength entered his finger holding the trigger and he fired a meaningless shot into the ceiling.

Accelerator turned his head in Hamazura's direction.

Hamazura realized that he would be killed if he didn't do something and he noticed a security robot approaching from further down the hallway. The terrorists had likely sealed them all in one room and it was now heading back on its normal route after having been released.

Hamazura nearly unloaded his clip into the security robot.

The bullets broke through the fairly durable armor and destroyed the components within. Hamazura stuck his hand inside. The characteristic weird feeling of electromagnetism numbed him from his fingertips to his back and then to his chest, but he ignored it and ripped out a piece.

It was a part of the large motor the robot used to move around.

Hamazura ripped the cords off of the large permanent magnet that was used in the motor and then threw it at Accelerator.

To prevent theft, the security and cleaning robots were purposefully made quite heavy. To make sure the machines could smoothly move up slopes, their motors were made to be rather powerful.

Yes, powerful enough that the permanent magnets they used could cause electronic devices to malfunction at close range.

(…Is it gonna work!?)

He had two bullets left in his handgun and he didn't have time to switch out magazines, but he should still be able to win if Accelerator had been weakened to the point where a bullet would kill him.

However, there was no worry on Accelerator's face.

Before the large magnet reached him, a strong unnatural wind knocked the thrown item away in a different direction.

"Oh, shit…!!"

He tried to evade, but his legs still hadn't recovered from the damage they had taken when he had struck the wall. Hamazura reacted too late and Accelerator mercilessly grabbed his collar.

He grabbed it with that arm that could bring death and fresh blood.

The battle was over.

Accelerator pulled Hamazura closer and then casually threw him aside. That was all it had been, but Hamazura's body shot away like a bullet. He rolled over and over along the hard floor until he finally came to a stop. Dull damage had permeated even the areas between his bones and the very depths of his organs, so he could not even stand up. He had never been more shocked that his exhalations were not accompanied by blood.

“Gh…Ah…!!”

Gritting his teeth at the intense pain, Hamazura still tried to grab at the floor with his fingertips.

Seeing that, Accelerator hit the switch on his electrode, extended his retractable cane, and mercilessly aimed his handgun.

He could kill Hamazura instantly with a single shot.

“This is over. If you stay down, I’ll leave you be, but if you get up, I’ll shoot. It’s your life. I leave the choice to you.”

“I don’t…cough…really have a choice...” Hamazura glared at Accelerator from the floor. “…You have no…real reason…to let me live…”

“True. I could easily just fill you full of lead without saying another word. In fact, killing you now may save me trouble later. I have no duty to bring on the risk of some later revenge by letting you live. Just finishing you off now would be simpler. But,” Accelerator added in an annoyed voice, “it’s not really fair for the sick girl to stand up to protect you, now is it?”

After hearing those words, Hamazura turned his gaze from Accelerator for the first time.

He turned his head and saw Takitsubo Rikou, whose consciousness was hazy and who was sweating profusely, approaching while desperately clinging to the wall.

She was doing it to protect him.

She was doing it to save him.

She was most likely in a worse state than Hamazura, but she was giving it everything she had.

“What’ll you do? If you want to use her as a shield and continue this 2 to 1, I’ll take you up on your offer and make a bloodbath out of you. But if you feel she would just get in the way in a battle, then this is over. As much as it pisses me off, I’ll leave you alone for now. That’s the aesthetics of a villain.”

Hearing that question, strength left Hamazura’s hand that was reaching for the handgun that had fallen to the floor.

He finally started to wonder why.

Accelerator was the one that was supposedly trying to hurt Takitsubo, so why was he trying to avoid having her in the fight? If he wanted to kill her, wouldn’t it be easier to kill them both at once?

(Don’t tell me…there’s been some kind of…misunderstanding on my part…?)

Before he could look back over towards Accelerator, he heard a light noise.

The esper must have manipulated the vectors in his legs somehow because Academy City's #1 had disappeared. All he could hear was a slight sound that sounded a bit like a vibration from elsewhere on that floor.

"Hamazura…"

As he sat there dumbfounded, Hamazura heard a girl's voice calling his name.

It was Takitsubo Rikou.

The girl he had most wanted to protect was dragging her body along towards him. She came over, sat down next to him, and lifted Hamazura's unmoving body to rest in her arms.

"Hamazura!!"

"I'm pathetic…" he muttered with his arms and legs still hanging limply at his sides. "I kept saying I would save you, but this is all I could do in the end. Ha ha. I'm so pathetic. I even bared my fangs towards the guy who may have saved you. I couldn't be more pathetic…"

"That isn't true."

Takitsubo desperately shook her head seeming to be in a good bit of pain herself.

Her trembling lips rejected Hamazura's view.

"Hamazura, you came this far all on your own. Not even Anti-Skill could break into this building, but you came charging in for me. You aren't pathetic."

"Is that so…" Hamazura muttered with a faint smile.

But he added more in his heart.

(Then…)

He gritted his teeth so that the girl would not notice.

(Then why are you crying?)

Hamazura had not been so badly beaten because Academy City's strongest Level

5 had shown up. If that monster had not been there and the terrorists had instead, would he really have been able to save Takitsubo Rikou? In fact, if the grade was dropped even lower to a group of delinquents, could he have even succeeded then?

He couldn't say for certain.

The odds were actually quite low. He was not a professional who had received special training, he was not a prodigy when it came to his battle sense, and he did not have a rare or powerful esper power. If he were part of a large scale conflict between groups, he was nothing more than a lowly thug who would end up collapsed in the corner of an alley.

Even if he threw everything away, put his life on the line, and stood up to fight, Hamazura could not even promise so simple a thing. If he were a protagonist-like person who had been wonderfully blessed since the moment he was born, he would have been able to save Takitsubo in a much smarter way. He wouldn't have had to make her worry so much. He felt a great sense of loss and he gritted his teeth upon realizing what it was.

It wasn't that something he had built up had collapsed.

It was the opposite. Hamazura became aware once more that he had gained nothing from his victory over Mugino Shizuri.

(…What's all this crap about me being the guy who defeated a Level 5 or being the guy who defeated the #4 all on his own? All I did was get full of myself over a fluke. It was meaningless. I'm the same Hamazura Shiage that I've always been. I didn't get any convenient dramatic change from that one event.)

"Fuck," Hamazura swore.

He wanted to be able to make sure Takitsubo didn't have to worry, but he also believed that he didn't have to gain an evil charisma like the #1 had.

He could simply remain a third-rate thug.

However, Hamazura Shiage wanted to at least become the kind of third-rate thug who could protect that girl's smile.

Part 11

(It looks like things went down in a super flashy way…)

Kinuhata Saiai was circling the private salon building from a slight distance. It seemed the former Spark Signal group had already been taken out and the Anti-Skill group blockading the building had started to enter the building while seeming bewildered by the sudden occurrence.

The Measure Heart girl in the dress had told Kinuhata that Hamazura Shiage had entered the building carrying a gun to save Takitsubo Rikou.

She doubted Hamazura could take on 10 former Spark Signal terrorists, but it seemed the two of them were fine. However, the problem did not end there.

Hamazura and Takitsubo were not currently taking part in work for the underground. Academy City would work to cover up incidents, but those two were not in a position to receive that kind of service. If Anti-Skill found them with weapons, they would be in trouble.

(I wish I had taken action super sooner.)

The reason Kinuhata had not arrived at the private salon building was simple: She had been investigating the Six Wings attack helicopter that had attacked the family car. The woman on the phone insisted she wasn’t behind it, but Kinuhata found it hard to believe that the former Spark Signal group had been somehow controlling it.

In the end, it had been wasted effort.

(I have to super apologize for being late and I like to pay people back super

quickly. I guess I should super help them escape.)

Despite thinking that, Kinuhata never had a chance to carry out her plan.

This was because Kinuhata's small body was blown away by a sudden shotgun blast from the side.

The girl's slender body wrapped in a white wool dress bounced two or three times on the road. The sudden gunshot caused a panic among the surrounding onlookers, but Kinuhata kept her cool as she rolled along. The blast had spread out to cover from her right cheek to her chest, but she was not bleeding thanks to Offense Armor.

(…I only heard one gunshot but there were 20 shots. Each individual bullet is greater than 5 mm. With that, I should be able to use something in the area as a shield without having to super use my powers!!)

Kinuhata had calculated out the strength of the attack from the one she had received and she then jumped behind a nearby parked car.

But the attacker accurately aimed the barrel.

The next shot did not have the usual single gunshot of a shotgun.

It was the sound of a gun on full auto.

"Wha—? That's not a normal shotgun!?"

The car did not last as a wall for even 2 seconds.

It wasn't just that bullet holes were created in it. Like a balloon being popped from within, the metal body tore apart. The downpour of shots that had pierced it headed straight for Kinuhata's body. Even with her thin wall of nitrogen, the overwhelming amount of force blew her away.

She was knocked over 10 meters away.

When she got back up, she realized she had a trail of blood running down her cheek.

It wasn’t a fatal wound, but her armor had been pierced.

Kinuhata shuddered and she heard a voice that did not match the scene.

“Hi there. You’re Kinuhata Saiai-chan, right? I thought your guard looked pretty tough which would make things difficult, but I made the right decision in contacting the *completely unrelated Spark Signal group* to use them as bait. While your focus was on them, I took the opportunity to take a bite out of your nice soft side. Academy City espers really are a pain, though,” the woman said as she operated a large gun that was almost as large as an umbrella.

Kinuhata heard a loud mechanical noise.

Breaking through the cloud of smoke she herself had created, the tall blonde woman approached.

She was holding a light machine gun with exceedingly high rapid-fire ability.

It was over a meter long. It was not the kind of assault rifle that was made so that it would have no effect on a soldier who was traveling long distances carrying it. It was much bigger than that. It had a box magazine that looked like it could hold 150 to 200 shots and it looked like something that would be used against a military encampment rather than a single person.

However, it was clearly using custom shotgun ammunition. No proper soldier would use a firearm like that. The combination of a shotgun which should be used at close range and that weight which was disadvantageous at close quarters was simply terrible. But that also meant that woman possessed the speed and skill to use something like that.

The woman carrying the light machine shotgun smiled.

“Do you recognize the name Sunazara Chimitsu? You’re the one that tried to blow him up, right?”

The way the woman said “right” was so cute it probably would have given Hamazura a nosebleed.

“I am Stephanie Gorgeouspalace. I came here to get revenge for Sunazara-san, so you should prepare yourself.”

She pointed that monstrous gun at Kinuhata and smiled as she gave that last death sentence.

Between the lines 2

Stephanie had been given a life of freedom in a country that was very, very peaceful. Eventually she embraced her doubts about that tepid environment (or perhaps, was given the freedom to embrace them), so she determined to leave. The motivation for that civilian to head to the battlefield as a mercenary had been exceedingly infantile. She had been in a period where she was concerned with the twisted parts of society and could not stand to ignore those who were suffering. She had been in a period where she would only be satisfied by helping out directly with her own ability.

And a civil war in Costa Rica became Stephanie’s first hell.

Unlike with proper soldiers, that was the distinctive baptism of a mercenary. It assaulted the novice Stephanie in the form of a discrepancy in intelligence. She had known about the attack helicopter, but she hadn’t heard anything of the additional electronics that included equipment to link in a highly sensitive anti-personnel ambush radar. Thanks to that, Stephanie’s mercenary unit had been unsuccessful in their attempt to hide in the thickets and had ended up having a large number of rockets come down from overhead.

The motley unit had been instantly annihilated.

Her comrades had not just been turned to corpses. Not even the dog tags that had been provided by their client had survived. Stephanie alone had miraculously survived, but that had not been due to her own actions.

A large caliber anti-tank rifle had accurately pierced through the attack

helicopter’s fuel tank from a great distance.

That had been when she had met Sunazara Chimitsu.

Unlike Stephanie, he was a rare type of mercenary who headed into battle alone instead of creating a team. She was injured and Sunazara had taken her in and saved her life. And it hadn’t ended there. Stephanie had headed into the battlefield with major gaps in her knowledge. If Sunazara had not proceeded to teach her every little skill she needed, she probably would have simply ended up dying in similar circumstances on a different battlefield.

Even when the civil war in Costa Rica ended, Stephanie stuck with Sunazara. It was partly due to how much she admired him, but she could not deny that it was also partly due to the fact that sticking with someone strong was a good way to survive as a mercenary.

And after taking part in battle after battle, a question occurred to Stephanie.

The value for her to stick with him was clear, but what did he gain from having her with him?

The sniper known as Sunazara Chimitsu used to work alone without creating a team. It seemed the reason for that was that an ally had once tripped him up and caused a major crisis, but then why was he letting a novice like Stephanie stay with him? He didn’t seem like the type who would allow that simply because he enjoyed having a young woman serving him.

She never directly asked him what his reason was, but she managed to make a pretty good guess from the things he said offhand.

It was possible Sunazara was tired of the life of a sniper.

In his job, he killed people with almost complete certainty. Even if he aimed for an arm or a leg instead of a vital point, the high powered rifle would still rip the limb off causing them to lose a large amount of blood and die from shock due to the pain. And since a sniper had to aim with pinpoint accuracy from long distances, he couldn’t exactly lower the power behind the bullet.

On the other hand, Stephanie’s specialty was not long distance sniping.

She had emulated him and used a sniper rifle a bit, but she had realized it just didn’t match her personality. She preferred high speed battles at extremely close quarters.

And at close quarters there was no reason that you absolutely had to kill your enemy.

Stephanie fought her enemies at 10 meters, 5 meters, or even less than a meter away, so she could get away with not killing her enemy by shooting them in the arms and legs with a lower power handgun bullet. And with someone she wasn’t sure was an enemy, she could use hand-to-hand methods to knock them down and incapacitate them.

It was possible that Sunazara envied that flexibility because he could do nothing but kill. It may have been asking for too much, but it may have had value in Sunazara’s eyes.

If he made the best of his skills as a sniper to analyze Stephanie’s actions, he could gain the ability to silently get to mid or close range.

If he did that, he may be able to put together a strategy where he could accurately shoot their arms and legs with a low power bullet and not kill them.

Of course, if he wasn’t used to it on a real battlefield, it could be fatally dangerous.

But if he succeeded in putting together such a strategy, that was great.

And even if he failed in putting together such a strategy, the number of people who would needlessly be killed at his hands would still lower.

It was possible he had been thinking those things in silence.

When Stephanie had that thought, she decided that she wanted to help him.

But she wanted to do it in a way other than the worst possible way that Sunazara himself was subconsciously wishing for.

And yet Stephanie’s determination had ended in vain.

Sunazara had been hired as a mercenary to take part in the conflict between Group, School, Item, Member, and Block, the 5 teams at the depths of Academy city. There he had been struck by his own target and injured badly enough that he still had not regained consciousness.

Sunazara was in the situation he had thought up as the worst possible result with a tiny bit of salvation.

And Stephanie Gorgeouspalace had sworn to take revenge.

She knew that it was selfish of her.

His path to that tiny salvation was supposed to have been more difficult and more complex, but Kinuhata Saiai had granted it for him almost too simply by means of death and violence.

And so Stephanie made Kinuhata the target of her selfish revenge.

Chapter 3: Destruction will open up a wider path.
Battle_to_Die.

Part 1

Accelerator and the others got back to the limo.

The atmosphere was incredibly tense.

Though there hadn't been anything like an atmosphere of them getting along to begin with, now it was at the point they would bare fangs at each other. It was at the point small animals would die of fright.

"…In the end, everything went as that Shiokishi bastard planned."

Accelerator said as if cursing.

"Anyone that wanted to know the truth of 'Dragon' has been eliminated. Guess the ones we captured at Hula Hoop are probably no longer in the same world as us."

"You mentioned Sugitani earlier, right?"

Tsuchimikado leaned on the wall, and spoke as if he was deep in thought.

"Indeed, when he was talking to us earlier via video conferencing, he mentioned the names of two subordinates—Sugitani and Minobe—when they adjusted the camera."

"So what."

Musujime said tiredly while playing absentmindedly with her hair.

“In the end, just what exactly is this Dragon anyway?”

If that could be answered, none of us would need to work this hard. She probably subconsciously asked that.

Unabara glanced specifically at Tsuchimikado’s expression.

Seeing as Tsuchimikado, who was also a ‘magician’ like him, didn’t respond in any way he decided to cut into the conversation.

“…Different to your science side, if you want an opinion from someone like me from the magic side, the term ‘Dragon’ easily makes people think of religious metaphors. Such as… something like *Angels*.”

“!!”

After hearing that, Accelerator involuntarily shuddered.

September 30th.

On that night where surrounding Last Order, Accelerator had fought with the Hound Dogs and Kihara Amata in a fight to the death, he had seen something similar to that. That was a flurry of wings made of light. Though there were still things he didn't understand about that incident, Accelerator had done some investigating and found out some things.

The emergence of those wings of light was connected to Kihara Amata and Last Order.

Also, the virus Kihara had used at the time was called ANGEL.

It didn’t matter if it was magic or the occult… Academy City wouldn’t just give up on them because of that.

Unabara’s opinion could still be mistaken, and for all they knew, all that had nothing to do with Dragon… but if ‘Angel’ and Dragon could be linked, then it wouldn’t be unconnected. That way, Last Order would be connected with Dragon, the most important secret of Academy City.

(…Just what has been hidden?)

Originally, Last Order and other Sisters were materials created for Accelerator's 'Experiment'. However, with the ending of the 'Experiment', these materials which were supposed to no longer be useful, now had a deep connection with the dark side of Academy City.

With that, it couldn't help but to give people thoughts to overturn the basic premises their thoughts were based on.

In other words, were there more plots inside the 'Level 6 Shift' project?

If everything was just the results somebody had planned, then had that 'Experiment' been created to fail from the beginning?

(… Just what did me and that brat get dragged into while we weren't noticing?)

Accelerator didn't know what Spark Signal planned to do when they took over the private salon. It was just that the fact where just changing sides could get you closer to Dragon had been completely blocked out made him feel powerless and nauseated.

"Anyway,"

Unabara stated to speak,

"This series of events that started from Hula Hoop is now over, so should we now… leave?"

"Then what about Dragon?"

Accelerator had barbs in his words.

"You want to run away with your tails between your legs without any clues from all this?"

"… Then from what you are saying, we should sneak into Shiokishi's stronghold?"

Tsuchimikado said exasperatedly.

"For Shiokishi who wears a powered suit 24 hours a day, his vigilance is the real

deal. His stronghold is also on the same level of a nuclear shelter, it's not easy to break through. … Because it was designed to handle scenarios where people like us rebel against them."

Then, Accelerator wordlessly shifted his glance towards Musujime.

She could use Move Point, a method of moving that ignored the limits of three-dimensions.

But, Musujime just shrugged.

"This isn't a problem about what method to use."

"What do you mean?"

"No matter what method we use, attacking head on and charging right into a fortress of that level is impossible. In the end that guy is someone, where even in Academy City, there is only 12 of. Truth be told, if we don't have the resolve to do a terrorist attack on the level of what happened at Hula Hoop, we can't even start."

"…On the same level, in other words if we can get an official member of the board of directors to become our ally, or to give him pressure politically, then we might be able to make him tell the truth."

"But first we'd need that kind of ally to begin with," Unabara added.

Accelerator, Tsuchimikado Motoharu, Musujime Awaki, and Unabara Mitsuki; all four of these people had someone that they needed to protect. Since that was the case, using terrorist attacks to forcibly find out the secret to Dragon was not the best plan.

The #1 of Academy City recalled that little girl, and while doing so his sight drifted to the window of the limo… then, he blankly muttered,

"…Guess we don't have time to leisurely discuss anymore."

"?"

For Tsuchimikado and others who hadn't understood what those words meant,

they looked together towards outside the window to see what Accelerator had seen.

Right after that,

Boom!!

The limo was hit by a portable anti-tank missile and turned into scrap metal along with the fiery explosion.

Of course, with only something like that Accelerator and others wouldn't die.

The limo had several exits prepared. Tsuchimikado and Unabara jumped out using different exits, Musujime escaped using Move Point, and as for Accelerator he used his ability to forcibly rip apart the walls to escape out the side opposite of where the missile was coming from.

The four of them regrouping and then fighting off the new enemy——that didn't happen.

They separately kept themselves alive and separately escaped. This was how Accelerator and others of Group did things.

(…That bastard Shiokishi. After that time, for us who know too much about Dragon, we became targets as well?)

He jumped into a smaller side street while appropriately approximating the reasons.

(…If that's the case, the possibility of forming a strike team with the scenario that they know my 'weakness' is very high. Not aiming to kill me using the shortest and quickest method possible, but to just to use a drawn out method of battling that will drain the batteries of my electrode. Then if I just charge in I'll only be toyed with and then die.)

In an instant, he remembered the driver of the limo, but Accelerator didn't put too much thought into it. Before or after the explosion he hadn't heard any screams. That driver had most likely been one of their people, and had run off

before the attack.

(…Then again, there is no need to run away like an idiot. Ascertaining the identity of the enemy will be good. At least it would be better than not knowing who we are fighting. Finding out how the other side is deploying their forces, and then striking swiftly at the ‘blind spot’ that will lead to their destruction the quickest, will be alright.)

To accomplish that tactic it would be better to first confuse the enemy’s sight. Accelerator went around them, and planned to observe their deployment.

Suddenly,

Accelerator’s electrode somehow had its capability taken away.

(—?!)

Losing the leg strength gained from manipulating vectors, Accelerator smashed brutally into the ground. This wasn’t a problem with the flesh only. Inside his brain… more specifically in the deepest part of his psyche, a slight sense of numbness filled everything.

It was just like being extremely drunk or still not quite awake after just getting up, his thoughts became fragmented and shattered, and lost connection to one another. Though he could understand he was lying on the ground, he could not plan to do anything about it.

Attacking Accelerator as he was curled up like a worm would be easy.

The switch for the electrode had been remotely controlled by someone else far away.

How he could still be affected even deep inside the alley meant it was probably a wide-area electromagnetic wave used for long distance controlling.

Accelerator’s ability was reliant on the electromagnetic network composed of nearly ten thousand military-use clones, so by shattering that network he could not use his ability.

If it was the usual Accelerator, he would have reached this conclusion immediately and then made a counter-strategy.

But now, even his brain for ‘making plans’ had been robbed from him.

“…”

On the ground and clenching his teeth, Accelerator looked in the direction of his right hand.

It was the specially-made crutch designed for situations like this.

Though it had things like motors and motion sensors attached onto it, in the end it could not maintain the movement faculty Accelerator had lost. For Accelerator who was lying on the ground, the most pressing problem was he couldn’t stand up even if he wanted to.

At this time, the sounds of footsteps came from the shadows of the alley.

He could somehow tell he was in danger, but specific thoughts like ‘what to do in this situation’ could not be recalled no matter what.

“…”

The sounds of footsteps came from the other direction as well, and there was the exit to this alley. Though enemies were coming in from all sides, Accelerator could not even think properly. His wrist was grabbed and then he was chucked into the seat next to the driver’s of a sports car. There was nothing he could do about it. The sports car started immediately, and swiftly moved onto the night road.

It was probably because the distance had increased between him and Shiokishi’s strike force, the long distance jamming electromagnetic waves were getting weaker. Accelerator was gradually recovering his senses. He turned the electrode back to the normal mode, and looked at the crutch that he had made. Then, he looked at the driver’s face.

“… You.”

He looked familiar.

He was the man that looked to be around the age of a high school student who had been dragged into the explosion at District 3. He should have gone with the injured pregnant woman to District 7…

“You must be surprised at the sudden events.”

The high school student lowered the speed of the sports car to the speed limit and said,

“However, once something happens my body will move by itself. Thanks to that I managed to let my life-saver… no, the person who saved something I care about more than my own life avoid death.”

The high school student’s face was smiling widely.

But Accelerator pulled out his gun from his pant’s pockets and unhesitatingly pointed it at the high school student.

“…In this piece of shit world at least a few things can be learned.”

He said disdainfully.

“You didn’t get there just in time to save me on a coincidence. No matter what, that was an attack plan made by Shiokishi, one of the board of directors; there’s no way someone familiar would be on scene.”

“…”

“You’re like me, another one of the residents of the dark side. Who put you up to this? Is this a double trap set up by Shiokishi?”

The high school student who had a gun pointed at him only stared straight ahead, not looking at Accelerator.

“That’s right…”

The tone of the high school student’s voice sounded like it was coming out of gritted teeth.

“I’m someone that has the same scent as you. But, our level is vastly different.

My job is to support big-shots like you. Basically like those grunts you'd see a dime a dozen."

"*However,*" he continued to say,

"…No matter how filthy I am, it doesn't change the fact you saved somebody that I value above my own life. And, I'm not that far gone to leave people like you for dead."

"…"

"This isn't something as simple as give and take. This is nothing on that level. This is a debt. Please let me repay that debt. If you don't like that then you can go ahead and pull the trigger, it doesn't matter."

Accelerator stared at the high school student's face for a short time.

He didn't turn around even once.

He probably was sure that he wouldn't be shot.

Accelerator scowled, and then moved the gun away from the high school student's face.

"Keep driving."

"Where do you want to go?"

The high school student holding onto the driving wheel asked while smiling.

Accelerator answered offhandedly without giving much thought,

"I'm going to butcher that bastard Shiokishi."

To completely seal all information on Dragon, Shiokishi of the board of directors had bared his fangs towards Accelerator and others. If Shiokishi found out his first wave of attack didn't manage to get rid of his targets, he would probably attack 'the most effective weak point'.

In other words, the hostage 'Last Order'.

Accelerator estimated that the current situation was not severe enough to force Shiokishi to play that card. Otherwise he would have prepared hostages in the beginning, to limit Accelerator and others' movements.

They had to finish this before Shiokishi moved onto his second plan.

Do they go on the attack or on the defense?

Immediately go back to Last Order and start a life on the run… though this choice was available, Accelerator thought this was not the best move. That was not an option. Because what he needed to protect was not just one girl, but the world that the girl loved. Yomikawa Aiho, Yoshikawa Kikyou; to protect everything around that girl while fighting, even for Accelerator that would be too difficult.

Then, what should he do?

Considering all this, Accelerator let off an extremely evil smile.

What needed to be done was simple.

Strike first.

Take down the enemy before he takes you down.

What was coming up next was a speed battle to see who could kill off the other team first.

(…mah, that's everything.)

Ha, the #1 of Academy City couldn't help but to laugh, and thought in the depth of his heart,

(…For a guy like me who's covered in blood, this method is the most suitable one!!)

Part 2

Kinuhata Saiai had a dull throbbing pain in her head.

Stephanie's light machine shotgun was causing severe damage even through Kinuhata's Offense Armor. Without that power, Kinuhata was just a frail girl (or so she insisted). If the bullets kept coming, she could easily receive a fatal injury.

(…Ow. Taking more than 7 shots in a row at a range of less than 5 meters would be super bad!!)

Kinuhata made a rough analysis from the damage she had taken.

She dived away from the large District 3 road and towards a slope leading underground.

Due to the terrorists, the underground mall seemed to be blocked off.

"Nya ha ha!"

Using both hands to carry a hunk of steel over a meter long, Stephanie laughed.

She spoke while holding that large weapon that looked out of place in that Japanese cityscape.

"Isn't that escape route a little too straight for escaping bullets?"

"!?"

The gunfire started without hesitation.

The mass of noise started sounding like one continuous noise rather than a shorter noise repeated at quick intervals.

Stephanie was aiming for Kinuhata from above the slope. That meant the ground should have made a thick barrier of asphalt and concrete between them.

Nevertheless, the rain of bullets continued after Kinuhata.

It was almost like a landslide.

The light machine shotgun had enough power to turn an armored vehicle into a

sponge in 3 seconds. It took Kinuhata a few seconds to realize it was merely blowing straight through the artificial ground. And in that time, a large number of bullets struck her small frame.

She was slammed into the ground once and then bounced back up almost like a basketball. She balled up her body and rolled across the ground to avoid a concentrated attack. Because the concrete that made up the ceiling of the underground mall and the ground of the surface had been destroyed, a car parked on the street fell down.

(!!)

Kinuhata did not hesitate.

She grabbed the car that was falling towards her head with one hand. The area around the door where her small palm touched it bent in making a horrible noise. Almost like when grabbing a cushion, a number of “wrinkles” raced along the metal car.

Kinuhata had grabbed that 500 kilogram mass but not so she could use it as a shield.

She was going to throw it as a weapon to crush Stephanie.

That was the exact same time Stephanie Gorgeouspalace stepped onto the remains of the destroyed concrete and headed down into the underground mall.

Her footing was unstable, so she was not in a situation where she could immediately jump to the side to avoid it.

And Kinuhata intended to throw it with all her strength so it would kill Stephanie.

(Super blow her away!!)

She twisted her upper body to gather strength and then swung the car around. She just had to let go to send an attack straight towards Stephanie that was on the level of the giant wrecking balls used to destroy houses.

A soldier or mercenary from outside the city could not stand up to an Academy

City Level 4.

Or so Kinuhata had thought.

Stephanie's light machine shotgun accurately shot the car's gas tank.

It was just before Kinuhata was about to let go.

(Wha—?)

The back of the car transformed into what looked like a burst soda can and the large amount of liquid stored inside the tank exploded like a bomb.

Sound disappeared.

A brilliant flash filled her vision.

Kinuhata's body was knocked aside by the blast. The underground mall usually had limited light, but intense light and heat overflowed in the area and black smoke crawled up to the ceiling.

Her means of turning the fight around had been sealed by yet another counter attack.

But Kinuhata was not simply surprised by Stephanie's cleverness and speed.

She was surprised by the foundation that supported it.

(She's…used to this? She's a super outsider, but she's super well versed in the theory of how to fight against an esper like me…?)

Normally, that couldn't be.

Even in Academy City where espers were a fact of life, not many people could handle a Level 4 like Kinuhata so easily. It was ridiculous to think there was someone from outside who could keep up with Kinuhata using only tactics and technology from outside.

"It couldn't be…"

Having thought that far, Kinuhata unsteadily raised her head.

Carrying her light machine shotgun, Stephanie stepped down from the rubble into the underground mall.

“Are you…?”

“So you finally realized it. Before I became a mercenary, I was a civilian in a peaceful country. I decided to go help the people caught up in war because I felt guilty happily enjoying peace while others suffered and lived in fear of guns, bombs, and mines.” The blonde woman smiled as she pointed the barrel that was wrapped in heat towards Kinuhata. “Yes, I was originally from Academy City. The sniper Sunazara-san must have thought I was odd indeed to use Anti-Skill apprehension techniques to kill.”

That was why Stephanie Gorgeouspalace was well versed in how to kill an esper.

“I believe you use the nitrogen in the air to guard against my attacks.” She moved the barrel of her light machine shotgun away from Kinuhata to a completely different spot. “Then I’ll start by messing that up. Luckily, this underground mall seems to have plenty of delicious restaurants. …There sure are a lot of propane tanks, aren’t there?”

She pulled the trigger.

Part 3

Accelerator took a ride in the high school student’s sports car, traveling on the road in the night. He had managed to contact Tsuchimikado using his cell phone, and like he thought the other members of Group were still on the run.

“Very good. Looks like you are the first one to escape the encirclement by Shiokishi’s strike force. You go on directly to District 21, there’s an observatory in the mountains.”

“Huh? You’re saying his stronghold is in the mountains?”

“That’s not it. If we want to strike at Shiokishi who is one of the official members of the board of directors, we need the necessary political preparations… it means, we need a backer that has the equivalent power of one of the Directors on the Board. The members of the Twelve Directors are all eccentric people to say the least. The only one who would help us is probably that person who is there at this time.”

"Kaizumi Tsugutoshi can also count as a good person, but the high school girl he has for an advisor—Kumokawa Seria——is too smart, so we can’t count on him," Tsuchimikado said helplessly.

“Come to think of it, who’s this person that can possibly help us?”

“Oyafune Monaka.”

Tsuchimikado answered immediately.

“She’s the one that is holding a charity astronomy trip for the kids that were captured during the Hula Hoop incident… the number one good person in the board of directors. Though I don’t like to do this, she owes us. If we just ask her this one time in our lives, there’s possibly still room for negotiations.”

And with that, the sports car that Accelerator was in set its course towards District 21.

This district was the only mountainous region in all of Academy City. …Having said that, it was only relative to the other districts. The tallest mountain at the top was only 200 meters high. While this district was most well known for being the research center of water, plants and animals, at the same time it was also quite famous for its astronomy observatories.

Small antennas that were a meter in diameter and might have been radio telescopes were lined up on the slopes, with one after another some set distance apart. The car that Accelerator was in was moving along this road that deliberately did not have much artificial lighting. Tire tracks were everywhere on this incredibly twisting road. Maybe, there are unofficial races here on the weekends.

The observatory was half way up the mountain.

Pressing against the slope of the mountain was a flattened artificially leveled surface made of cement. As the sports car entered the parking lot, Accelerator saw a small bus. There was nobody on the bus. From the looks of it, the kids that had previously been captured by Spark Signal, were now enjoying their scheduled activity.

“You can leave now after letting me off here.”

Accelerator opened his door and said that while his crutch was holding onto the asphalt.

The high school student that was the impromptu driver hastily disagreed.

“W-wait. I’ve already said I want to repay my debt. Even a grunt like me can understand that you’ve been dragged into something troublesome. How can I just stop half way?”

“I haven’t done anything that’s that over-the-top. If I accept any more help from you I’d be the one owing you.”

Accelerator stood in the parking lot leaning on his crutch and said simply.

“… Plus, if you get in any deeper you might end up as a target as well. I don’t give a damn about a grunt like you, but if that pregnant woman that was finally saved became a hostage, I wouldn’t be able to sleep soundly.”

“You…”

“If I really need help I’ll contact you. You go lie low and wait for the time being. Hiding pawns that can move freely is also an important tactic in survival. Let me use you that way.”

“Understood. Oi, let us exchange our cell phone numbers. If there’s any danger definitely contact me!”

The both of them operated their phones and using the infrared communication function to exchange numbers.

After that was done, the high school student reluctantly left the observatory with his sports car.

(…Now,)

Accelerator sighed a small breath.

The number he had given him was just a randomly made-up fake number. His own cell phone had also rejected the number that the high school student sent to him.

With that, the connection between the two of them was completely gone. This was how Accelerator did things.

From the parking lot he looked up at the observatory's large building.

One of the members on the board of directors—Oyafune Monaka was there. A VIP that could allow them to accomplish the operation to eliminate Shiokishi who was also one of the Directors.

The number one good person on the board of directors, in other words someone that was completely opposite to someone like Accelerator.

Though they had never communicated with each other, Oyafune owed Accelerator on two occasions.

One was what Tsuchimikado had just mentioned, how they had saved the kids at Hula Hoop.

Two, during the battle between the five organizations Group, Item, School, Block and Member, they had thwarted a plan to snipe Oyafune Monaka.

The devious Tsuchimikado was telling him to focus on those incidents and get her cooperation no matter what… But looking at Accelerator's actions up to this point, it was easy to understand there was probably no other job that was more unsuitable for him.

(…Now this will be troublesome.)

Accelerator scratched his head and walked towards the observatory aided by his

crutch.

Either way, if they couldn't meet face to face they couldn't continue with their plan. However…

"Please go back."

As soon as I get here I run into difficulties, Accelerator thought.

Incidentally, the one that rejected him at the parking lot close to the observatory wasn't Oyafune Monaka herself. It was a small man that looked like her secretary. The small man, whose ranking among the who-knew-how-many secretaries a Director needed was unknown, stood in front of Accelerator as if he was crazy. He stared at Accelerator as if to block off his path to Oyafune Monaka.

"Well, Director Oyafune in the past does indeed have her ways. Her specialty is negotiating without needing to use force to back it up. It has even been called 'peaceful invasion' by some people. She's someone feared by all of the ambassadors from other countries."

The small secretary waved his fists that had never punched someone, and continued on.

"But, she no longer does that anymore. She's tired of the life which goes to and fro between Light and Darkness. You're someone that looks at the peaceful world from the darkness' viewpoint, can you not understand how difficult it is to throw all that away, and how important it is to treasure that? Or, have you fallen to the point that you can no longer understand those kinds of things?"

Che, Accelerator couldn't help but scowl.

He was now extremely angry, but it was not directed at the small man's attitude.

(…That bastard Tsuchimikado. What 'The only person that can help us'? In the end it turned out to be the most troublesome outcome anyway. How dare you send me on an errand like one of those normal small-fries. If I don't give you five rounds rapid the next time I see you I won't be able to breathe right.)

Accelerator felt like his stomach was boiling right now, but he didn't show it.

"Sorry to intrude."

"…You're, willing to give up?"

"Didn't you want things to turn out this way? Or do you want to set up our forces to slaughter each other to our hearts' content?"

"Even if that happens, it won't change what I have to do."

For the small secretary that finally realized the possibility it could have turned out that way, his face started to go blue. Looking at the secretary that wouldn't move aside even if that happened, Accelerator asked,

"One last question. Just what happened to that Oyafune bastard?"

"…It's her daughter."

The small secretary answered straightforwardly.

"When the board of directors were setting up regulations to export weapons to the 'outside', Director Oyafune who is on the side against military exports gained the upper hand using her negotiation skills. Because she truly dislikes wars. At that time, Director Oyafune's office received an envelope. Inside was a photo of her daughter and a large-caliber handgun that hadn't been used before. …Though nothing has happened, I think it was probably Shiokishi of the pro-military-export faction's actions."

"…"

Accelerator's brows creased. Though it was only for an instant, but they definitely had moved.

The small secretary had probably approved the '#1 of Academy City' that he was trying to chase away. He shifted his gaze away from him and continued to say,

"From then on, Director Oyafune stepped down from negotiations. Live while not touching the darkness of this city, but limit their actions inside the darkness without them knowing by working on areas outside their attention… She has

tried to live that kind of life as her goal. That kind of delicate balance is a golden ratio that only Oyafune Monaka, who's an expert in 'negotiations' can create… If you people intervene this balance will crumble. Her daughter and ones around her will be targeted once more."

So that's it, Accelerator mumbled in a low voice.

As the small secretary turned away, Oyafune Monaka finally noticed their small argument. The old woman jogged towards Accelerator and the secretary. Though the look on the secretary's face changed drastically, she didn't seem to notice.

"And you… are?"

Oyafune looked at Accelerator with a strange expression. Accelerator had once saved her life from a sniper behind the scenes, but because it had been behind the scenes she did not know about him.

"…It's nothing."

He didn't want to especially show that incident off.

Tsuchimikado had told him to use that, but he felt from the bottom of his heart that if he was going to be that shameless, he was better off falling straight into hell.

"I'm just asking for directions."

After saying what needed to be said, Accelerator turned away from Oyafune and her secretary.

This time, it was the small secretary that asked something,

"…Just what exactly has happened on your end? Those things that cannot be talked about above the table, I can guess what it is about somewhat. Even so, you came here. One last question, just what has happened to you?"

"What will it do even if you know about it?"

Accelerator answered as if he was bored.

“For something that’s already rejected, if you ask further it will only lead to more burdens. The troubles between me and that Shiokishi bastard are better off not being known by you.”

“Ah.”

That short conversation made the secretary’s face change dramatically.

Ignoring the details the secretary could at least tell what had happened as a whole. The other side for some reason had to fight against one of the Directors, and they needed help from Oyafune who was also one of the Directors. Without her help they probably could not win against Shiokishi, and even if they did win they would be treated as terrorists.

He subconsciously moved his eyes off of Accelerator.

“…I’m sorry.”

“That’s my problem. You don’t need to know about it.”

Accelerator said as if he was bored.

“If I had known this would happen I would have settled this myself. Though things would get troublesome, at least you people don’t have to deal with it.”

After the battle with Shiokishi, Accelerator would probably be treated as a terrorist.

He would lose all support and would no longer be able to live the life he had lived so far. He would never be able to see Last Order again. If there was a conflict of interest, he might even have Tsuchimikado Motoharu, Unabara Mitsuki and Musujime Awaki as his enemies.

But,

But so what.

After all, weren’t all these what he had decided on? Even if he had to become the enemy with Last Order that he needed to protect, he would fight for protecting Last Order. If so, then there was only one thing left to do. Even if he didn’t

especially bring Oyafune into this, the path he needed to take was right there in front of him.

“Sorry to intrude. Forget everything that I have just said. I’ll handle that bastard myself.”

Without waiting for an answer, this time Accelerator turned completely away.

At this time,

“What are you doing?”

A new voice brusquely entered his ears.

It was a voice coming from a boy who wasn’t even ten years old. It was a voice from one of the primary school students who was there for a charity observatory field trip. At the same time, this was the voice of the hostage that Accelerator had saved at Hula Hoop at the last second.

“You’re the hero from that time right? What are you doing here?”

“…Nothing.”

“I heard what you were talking about before.”

Those words made Accelerator and the small secretary look towards the young boy. At this time, the boy walked towards them. Unhesitatingly, towards the monster who was the #1 of Academy City.

Because he had been saved by him before, the young boy was not on guard at all.

“Though I don’t know what has happened, but you are going to battle right? You’re going to save people like how I was back at that time, right?”

The young boy looked directly at Accelerator, and said,

“If that’s the case then I’m coming too.”

…*What kind of ridiculous joke is this?* Accelerator subconsciously face-palmed.

“Stop joking, you damn brat. Who, is going to battle alongside who?”

“Then, are you saying you are going to let those people die without going to help?”

Of these three people that were being pointed at, the one that was most shocked was Oyafune Monaka.

The small secretary had an idea what would happen, and was gritting his teeth behind their view.

“I know, you won’t go fight for insignificant things. I also know you are going somewhere incredibly dangerous. I know there are more people like me who are in trouble, so I want to fight with you.”

He completely didn’t understand what was going on, but still talked that way.

Looking at their battle capabilities was enough to immediately understand this was such a laughable and unrealistic opinion.

Even so, Accelerator didn’t ignore all that and just turn to leave. Though it was looking down from above to the other side, he was replying seriously to answer his serious question.

“…It won’t be necessary.”

“But—”

“Wasn’t I by myself back at Hula Hoop? That time, with those boring terrorists, did you see if they were a threat to me?”

“I was blindfolded so I don’t know.”

“Is that so. Then I’ll tell you now: there was no threat. This time is the same.”

That was not the case.

Not just Accelerator who was at the pinnacle of the world of darkness, even Oyafune Monaka and the small man who was her secretary understand.

Accelerator was indeed powerful.

But, he was able to use his power fully in the darkness because of those from up to the board of directors, and down to various departments and facilities providing assistance to him. Losing all that and even turning them into his enemies, turning the entire military force of Academy City into his enemies had an unrivaled great danger.

This was no longer just Accelerator's problem.

This was a problem that would affect everyone that he wanted to protect.

The switch on his electrode would be remotely controlled, his enemy would turn off his ability whenever they wanted. Just like the battle with Kihara Amata and the Hound Dogs, a struggle where he had to battle in a chaotic situation was unavoidable.

Even so,

"I'm the Strongest Level 5, I don't need brats worrying about me."

Accelerator didn't mention any of those things.

There was no reason to let the young boy know any of those things.

To make sure the young boy didn't get dragged further into the darkness, without giving any hints the danger he would be facing, Accelerator said,

"Listen up. Even if there are people being hurt in front of you, those who take up weapons unhesitatingly to take down the bad guys are villains that are no better than them. Not considering other's thoughts, not giving them a chance to change their ways, the one that kills for their own reasons is definitely not a good person. You don't need to become someone like that. That's my specialty. Only I have to do something like that."

This kind of courage and insight, probably only the person that knew everything that had happened so far could understand.

Oyafune Monaka and her small secretary probably could only understand a small portion of it.

“I’m enough by myself, people like you don’t need to show up.”

“…I don’t want to.”

Faced with the words that wanted to kill off any kindness, the young boy tried talk back in a small voice,

“I can fight as well.”

Lifting his head and looking at the strongest Level 5 of Academy City, the young boy yelled with all his strength,

“I don’t want to hand Academy City to those despicable people!”

Maybe it was because they had finally noticed the commotion.

Oyafune’s other secretaries, or maybe private security forces… either way, several men came over and placed their hands on the young boy’s shoulders. Though their actions were kind, in reality it was to force the boy to step away from Oyafune. Though his body was being forced, the young boy’s eyes never left Accelerator. Until the teacher finally arrived, until that last moment, he stared at Accelerator’s face.

Accelerator looked in the direction where the boy was being taken back to his classmates and back to the field trip long after he left.

The ones who did so was not just him.

As one of the official members of the board of directors of Academy City, Oyafune Monaka was the same. She too looked over in that direction.

“…You mentioned Shiokishi earlier right?”

“Director Oyafune!”

The small man who was a secretary tried to interject, but Oyafune kept staring at

Accelerator's face.

Oyafune Monaka, from that incident with her daughter, knew just how frightening Shiokishi was in politics.

And, she also knew just how dangerous it would be for Accelerator who was going to fight one of the official members of the board of directors.

On the other hand, Accelerator actually replied her using a tone of rejection,

"You don't need to worry about it."

"From how this looks… Just like how that boy said, you plan to fight."

At this point, Oyafune sighed a small sigh.

She was probably recalling the words that boy had spoken at the end.

—don't want to hand Academy City to those despicable people.

Though the boy could not imagine the specific looks of the enemy, but the so-called 'despicable people' was probably the vaguest impression for the darkness that lurked in this city.

But, it was because of that, that Oyafune Monaka thought,

Though she knew about the darkness in this city, she had given up on fighting it; was she one of those 'despicable people' that the boy was talking about?

Oyafune Monaka, an old woman that didn't use force and only used her negotiation skills who challenged the world with her rule of not shedding blood; when she heard the term 'despicable people' she could not hold her chest high and argue against that term.

"…What, should I do?"

"Hell if I know."

Faced with Oyafune who was talking to herself, Accelerator scowled while replying in a bored manner,

“It’s your life, your choice.”

At these words that sounded like a reproach, Oyafune couldn’t help but to laugh.

To be able to say that straight away was probably because Accelerator had lived his life that way.

And, now it was the same; to protect something.

Oyafune Monaka placed her hand on something nearby.

It was the black bulletproof car that Oyafune rode in.

She placed her right hand first on the top of the limo, and then her left hand. With that, as she was currently parallel to her vehicle,

Don!

She slammed her own fists hard onto the bulletproof car.

Director Oyafune! The small secretary cried out.

But, Oyafune Monaka herself didn’t care. So long, it had been so long. Oyafune Monaka retrieved with her own hands the feeling when something was hurt. The negative emotions inside of her seem to have been swept away. With that expression, she turned once more to look at Accelerator’s face.

“…I’ve finally awakened.”

“Stop talking nonsense. I’ve decided to do this myself.”

“It’s my life, my choice.”

Facing Accelerator who was ascertaining the situation, Oyafune immediately replied.

“When I received the photo of my daughter and that large-caliber handgun, I thought dulling my edge was the best way to protect those that I care about.”

“…”

“But, why didn’t I think this way? My daughter was targeted because I was being looked down on by others. If I do not destroy the source of this evil, no matter how much time passes, the ones important to me won’t be able to escape from danger.”

Oyafune Monaka stood in front of Academy City’s strongest Level 5.

At this time, the standing between the two of them was finally equal.

On a different dimension to common grunts who relied on strength alone, at the core of their hearts, the two of them stood on equal positions.

Accelerator had seen people with that look in their eyes before.

Anti-Skill member Yomikawa Aiho, and ex-researcher Yoshikawa Kikyou.

“Let us go to Shiokishi’s place. That’s the best plan. His stronghold, regardless of it being physically or politically attacked, is rock solid. But if someone like me who also has the power of a member of the board of directors joins the fighting, the latter problem can be solved.”

“Che,” Accelerator scowled.

But, the small secretary could not just let it go.

“Director Oyafune!! But, this method…!!”

“This is something that I have decided myself. Even if he left, I would fight Shiokishi alone. If that’s the case, wouldn’t the best method be to work together?”

At this time, the small man who was a secretary that had felt the strength of her will glared viciously at Accelerator. He had just said something like he wouldn’t drag Oyafune into all of this.

“He only told me to ‘make my own choice’. He didn’t demand anything. I have only just decided on my own path. There is no reason to blame him. He already gave me consideration to the largest extent.”

“Damn it…!!”

The small secretary let out cursing that he would never normally use. Then, he opened the door to the black bulletproof car, rummaged around the glovebox, and brought out a gun.

It wasn’t something he brought out to point at Accelerator or Oyafune Monaka.

Quite the opposite.

“For someone as outstanding as Director Monaka she cannot possibly be allowed to die for something as boring as this. For someone like her, she should use her skills in a broader territory, as she has the potential to make a lot more people happy.”

While he checked the bullets in the gun with a skill that made it obvious he was not familiar with it, the secretary glared at Accelerator.

“Oi. If you are here asking for cooperation then do the minimum of your duty! Protect her with all your might! If you let Director Monaka die I’ll turn you into a beehive with bullets!”

“That’s rather impressive of you. You’re suited to become a villain.”

“Please don’t say scary things like that with a praising tone.”

In their exchange of words, Accelerator, Oyafune Monaka and the small secretary got into the black bulletproof limo.

The destination this time was the dark side of the board of directors—Shiokishi’s stronghold.

Taking the history’s strongest villain with her, the board of directors’ negotiator —Oyafune Monaka, was making her comeback!

Part 4

It seemed something had happened to Kinuhata Saiai.

That was what Hamazura and Takitsubo finally realized after the terrorist attack was over and they had snuck out of the private salon building while Anti-Skill was investigating.

“…I have an email from Kinuhata on my phone.”

Takitsubo had shown Hamazura the email on the screen of her cutely designed cell phone. It said, “I’m going to help you escape, so stay where you are for a bit.” It had been some time since the email had been sent, but they had seen no sign of any action taken by Kinuhata.

In the end, the two of them had escaped the private salon building on their own.

“Hey, have you contacted her yet? I hope she didn’t go in there and we missed her.”

“I’ve been calling Kinuhata, but I can’t get through.”

Takitsubo was staring at her phone with a vacant look in her eyes.

Hamazura couldn’t be sure if it was due to the lingering effects of the Body Crystal or if that was just how she always was because she had already been using Body Crystal when he had first met her.

“Hamazura, what do we do now?”

“Well, Kinuhata is a Level 4 and she’s tougher than both of us. She did send us that email, so it might be best to stay put and wait for her to contact us. It would take something really insane to kill someone like—”

Hamazura trailed off because an area of District 3 suddenly exploded.

It wasn’t a building that was blown away. It came from underground. The ground a distance away suddenly split open and crimson flames spewed up from beneath.

It wasn’t just one explosion.

As more explosions followed, more and more flames came up from within the earth. The asphalt was ripped apart and cars parked on the street were swallowed up. Luckily, very few people were around due to the terrorists at the private salon, so it didn't look like any people were swallowed up.

To Hamazura, it somehow looked like the explosions were slowly approaching them.

His trembling lips moved as he watched it.

"Oh, come on!! Why does something 'really insane' have to happen now!?"

He had no proof that Kinuhata was involved with those explosions, but it was likely that something like that involved the people from the city's darkness that Hamazura and Takitsubo had once been part of.

"And what's exploding anyway?"

"Hamazura, it might be the underground mall."

Takitsubo pointed over towards a large crowd coming from a department store. They seemed to be frantically trying to flee due to the black smoke coming up from underground.

Hamazura looked around and found the entrance to the underground mall that was connected with the ticket gate for the subway. He headed down the stairs that was spewing black smoke like a smokestack and he found an orange light down blow.

It was like the fires of hell.

The area Hamazura was in had not been enveloped by flames yet, but the blazing orange light from further in was being reflected off the tile floor and ceiling as well as the glass walls making a thick barrier of light. The air itself was unusually hot, so it felt like he was inside a giant oven.

He didn't know exactly what had happened and he had no proof that Kinuhata was there.

He faltered.

That storm of flames was much too dangerous to enter in order to search for someone who might not even be in there. However, it would all be for naught if he became surrounded by flames before he even decided what to do.

(What do I do? Do I go on or head back…?)

“Hamazura, over there!!”

Takitsubo pointed towards something on the other side of the orange flames. It was a human form. The small figure was stuck where it was due to a wall of flames blocking its path.

Seeing that, Hamazura shouted the figure’s name.

“Kinuhata!!”

Hearing that, Kinuhata looked over towards Hamazura in shock. She was not relieved upon seeing his face and yelled back looking even tenser than before.

“You need to super get down!! Just getting behind cover isn’t enough!!”

As soon as he heard that, Hamazura noticed a much taller figure beyond the flames along with Kinuhata.

That figure held something long and narrow. It looked something like a machine gun and the figure was turning it in his direction.

“!!”

Hamazura jumped over at Takitsubo knocking her to the floor. The heated tiles burned them, but that was the least of their worries.

A large number of bullets flew from the other side of the flames.

They cut across a horizontal line at about the height of a human waist. And it seemed the bullets were not normal rifle bullets. They didn’t just tear through the glass walls; they tore through the concrete pillars near the stairs, too.

“Nya ha ha!”

After a few seconds, the gunfire stopped.

That storm of destruction had not actually been meant to kill Hamazura and Kinuhata. The tall figure's target was probably Kinuhata. The tall figure—most likely a woman—aimed the large gun at Kinuhata and spoke.

"You use nitrogen to create a barrier, so I thought I could seal that by doing something about the air. Getting rid of nitrogen is rather difficult though because it makes up 70% of the air."

(Did she do this…?)

Lying on the floor, Hamazura tried to collect as much information as he could. She may have used the propane gas at the surrounding restaurants to turn the underground mall into the sea of flames it currently was.

The way she held the gun reminded him a bit of the Anti-Skill members he had seen in his more delinquent days.

However, Anti-Skill fought to protect the children so they would not go that far to fight an esper.

(Is she part of the city's darkness like us? That giant gun is clearly different from the more easily hidden submachine guns the terrorists used…)

The enemy knew what Kinuhata's power was and she was trying to take advantage of a weakness in it.

Hamazura pulled out his small handgun.

It was easy to carry around, but its small size meant it had poor accuracy at longer ranges. To make sure he hit, he needed to be no more than 30 meters away.

(Her machine gun is clearly the better gun. If she notices me trying to shoot, she'll send a stream of bullets this way truly intending to kill me. What should I do? How do I get closer without her noticing?)

The woman did not wait for him to think it all out.

"But if an explosion is triggered with certain requirements met, it can create vacuum-like circumstances for an instant. Of course, it's an exceedingly local

phenomenon. It’s only a hole a few dozen centimeters across.”

“!? Hamazura, super get away!!”

“If I fire a bullet through that hole, you won’t be able to use that shield of yours, will you?”

Multiple explosions occurred at the same time.

They seemed to be surrounding Kinuhata’s small frame. The overwhelming flash of light filled Hamazura’s vision and the shockwave headed towards him and Takitsubo like it was moving through a tube.

Hamazura immediately covered Takitsubo’s mouth and nose with his hands and clenched his own eyes shut. Breathing in that wave of heat would destroy one’s throat and organs.

After the scorching wind passed by, Hamazura finally opened his eyes.

Beyond the flames, the tall figure was pointing its machine gun at Kinuhata.

According to the enemy, Kinuhata Saiai could not surround herself with her shield in a local vacuum. If a bullet were shot through that hole, it would tear through her defenseless body.

“Kinuhata!!”

No response came.

All he heard was the dreadful repeated sound of gunfire coming from the tall figure’s machine gun.

Part 5

Accelerator and others met up once again.

The location was District 2. It was a district filled with facilities that were linked with things that made a huge amount of noise, such as cars and explosives. This district was surrounded by a soundproof wall, and had equipment which fired out specially tuned sound waves that caused destructive interference[1] and lowered ambient noise.

“It’s probably a trait of this district, there’s not many people here… there is a lot of military-related facilities though. For Shiokishi who’s good at designing weapons this sure looks like his home.”

Tsuchimikado said in a half-mocking voice.

They were at a fuel station which also doubled as a fastfood stop. It felt just like a service area on the highways.

“So we’ve found the stronghold of this Shiokishi guy?”

“According to Oyafune, he’s in one of the experimental shelters inside this district.”

Accelerator said while cursing.

“This district uses explosives a lot right? That’s because they make models of shelters here, and then bombard it using shock waves from all directions to test its durability. Shiokishi hides his strongest fortress in the background with all the rest of them as cover.”

“That Oyafune…”

Tsuchimikado turned around and found an old lady responding to him with a smile. Except now her clothes were that of a suit.

She felt Tsuchimikado’s gaze on her and briefly explained,

“Hm. The preparations are complete.”

“That secretary did say he’d wait at a ‘safe place’ right?”

Tsuchimikado said while shrugging.

Accelerator on the other hand looked at Oyafune and said,

“That secretary actually agreed to this.”

“Mah~ he just didn’t want to do anything risky.”

Whether this counted as an answer or not, Oyafune only replied ambiguously.

Tsuchimikado clapped twice.

“We have everything we need now, so let’s settle this quickly. We’re not people that are the kind who talk face to face about everyday things.”

On the other side was Shiokishi, one of the 12 members of the board of directors for Academy City, and his face was tightly wound up.

The space inside of the tunnel-like structure made of special armor may have been spacious, but the furnishings were quite plain. As a whole, it felt like being inside a warship or an aircraft carrier. Only from various places like the luxurious cabinets and chairs could anyone find the tastes of the one who lived there.

For Shiokishi, ‘safety’ was the greatest luxury, and this was the result of his massive efforts and large amounts of money. In reality, the costs of setting up this aggregation of military secrets was much greater than what would be needed to purchase a European medieval castle.

But now,

The ‘safety’ that this tycoon favored to the extreme was being shaken right to its foundations.

“…We are both members of the board of directors, so it’s necessary to implement the observation system between those with the same powers…”

Between the twelve of them, they did have that kind of agreement.

Among the official members of the board of directors, they needed to have equal power between them at all times. To prevent one of them standing out and disrupting the balance of power, the committee needed to look at the opinions of any of the twelve Directors equally. For Academy City to work democratically, this was a necessary setup… this was the widely known, agreed, and discussed goal.

Of course, all that was merely superficial acting.

These twelve people had all built up strength in areas they were most proficient in, looking for opportunities to take down their rivals, and make Academy City work to the direction most beneficial for themselves; even if it was for just one tiny bit.

For someone to actually use this setup that was merely for decoration purposes, it should have been impossible.

(…Can this be somehow brushed off?)

Shiokishi considered. Normally speaking, just handling something like this perfunctorily would be enough.

But that wouldn't work this time.

Once again he sought out confirmation using the network for Directors' use only, and found between the twelve members there were indeed many agreements that didn't have much impact. Though any one of these agreements didn't have any great powers in themselves, amazingly every one of them was linked to the observation system between members that had equal powers. If he tried to seal one, another would get in the way. Trying to completely do away with another would also lead to conflict with other agreements. The persistent feeling was like someone had spent countless years weaving a spider net and finally herded their target into a dead end.

"That vixen… I had thought this was no more than a tiresome peace agreement after she had lost her power, but she had actually planned this from the start!"

Thinking about this kind of persistence, and the fact he didn't even see through this trap until this day it activated, Shiokishi felt afraid. All this time he was supposed to have been the one that was putting Oyafune Monaka under his

surveillance.

“Please decide on the course of action.”

The assassin he had raised with his own hands, who was currently standing by next to him - Sugitani said directly.

“This shelter has political and physical functions to prevent a third party invading, but because Oyafune Monaka has invoked the observation system between members that have equal powers the political defense functions are now useless. Also…”

“If the information from the cameras are accurate, Oyafune now has Group that’s led by Accelerator as her pawns, or a relationship like a battle alliance. Even if we deny her inspection and defend ourselves inside this shelter it can’t be called ‘safe’. …No matter how well prepared we are, if I am assassinated then everything is over. As they are right now, even if they are classed as having combat value above that of nuclear warheads it wouldn’t be too much of an exaggeration.”

Shiokishi, who was completely covered in the powered suit, was wringing his hands as if on the verge of going into hysterics. In contrast to him, Sugitani standing at the side seemed as unruffled as usual.

“…However, would they really use the forceful method? Even if they have the excuse of ‘the inspection was denied’ and can legitimately attack us, if they really attack us it will lead to a war between the members of the board of directors.”

“…They will definitely attack.”

Shiokishi said as he paced around the room, lifting his feet that were covered in Western-esque armor.

“Because this is about Dragon, even if there’s a slight trace about it they will come.”

“Not taking into account those four of Group, Oyafune Monaka probably doesn’t have that kind of thoughts.”

“On the subject of motivation, that woman is the most troublesome. Don’t be fooled by how meek she is now, the Oyafune Monaka of the past was someone that would go head on against a country just because of a child she didn’t know personally cried. No matter what kind of political techniques were used it could not stop her. If she has started to move now then we can only fight back using force.”

“Take control of her daughter Oyafune Suama?”

“That might work against Oyafune but it would be useless against Group. Is this the time to waste resources on unnecessary things?”

Maybe because he had already ran through this scenario in his head countless times, Shiokishi immediately said,

“Split up our forces to take hostages, what will happen if the shelter was taken while that happens? Even if the hostage is finally captured, there’s no meaning if I have a knife pressed to my neck as well while we are at it. That cannot possibly be the basis of ‘safety’.”

…as long as the enemy’s important thing was under his control, even if there was a gun pointed at his head there should still be room for negotiations… that was something out of the question for Shiokishi. Even as a joke, he would never risk his life in the battle plans.

With that, Shiokishi finally decided.

“We’ll take them on here.”

Sugitani didn’t raise any objections. He only followed orders.

Knowing that his attitude was for giving him a sense of security, Shiokishi steadied his tone and continued,

“This is the final battle. Assemble all the forces sent out to attack Group and the ones sent to take the hostage back here. Let the forces inside the shelter withstand Group’s attack at first, and then let the others come from outside and surround Group. Flank them and then destroy them.”

“And about the issue where Oyafune has the right to attack?”

“We can’t just shrug them off. Get the information analyzing department to completely go through their request documents. Even saying something like ‘the seal is blurred’ is alright, as long as the organization cannot process their documents and reasons it would be our victory.”

Shiokishi who was completely covered by the thick powered suit swiftly thought.

His brain worked the fastest whenever ‘safety’ was involved.

“The ‘reasons for action’ always have their own interests involved. Putting aside those ‘righteousness’ that is merely a sham for those up to no good, all that is left is using force to settle everything. Then, as long as we win, convincing the other members of the board of directors will be easier. …Up to now we’ve managed to win using this method, and we will continue to do so from now on.”

“Then,”

“Let us begin. No matter what, if I don't take down Oyafune Monaka and Group, I won’t be able to rest properly.”

At one corner of another similar circular shelter, Accelerator and the rest of them that got to this point stopped in their path.

Behind the parked vehicles, around the corner of buildings, under the eaves of factories.

In this view which looked plain at first glance, professional armed forces wearing special bullet-proof clothes and wielding rifles and submachine guns were hidden.

They were Shiokishi’s underlings.

Accelerator and the rest of them stopped to give them a sign.

They were not giving up, they were not surrendering.

Rather, it was a declaration they would fight to the end.

Powered suits almost 7m tall jumped down from buildings one by one. They instantly started to set up armored vehicles and barricades. On top of the suits and armored vehicles were cannons like those of tanks.

Tsuchimikado couldn't help but laugh.

"Shiokishi is part of the military faction, alright. Even the weapons he gives to his underlings are this over-the-top."

"…What do you people think? Since it's one of the Directors, they should know normal battle forces won't work against Accelerator."

"Haven't you noticed?"

Accelerator who was holding a crutch pointed up with his chin. At the top of the circular shelter that Shiokishi was trying to hold, was a metal sphere like a basketball that was just like an omnidirectional radar.

"That's a device used to disrupt AIM diffusion fields. The main body is probably part of the dome. At the Youth Correction Center of this city, isn't there AIM disruption devices to prevent people using their ability to escape? The one above us is the board of directors' special edition, and the setting right now is probably most targeted at you. For a shelter that can withstand nuclear attacks, the ones they are most afraid of are those with the 'Teleport' type ability that can ignore 3-dimensional defenses."

Having heard that, Musujime took out her military-use flashlight from her belt and waved it around a few times in her hand. She then furrowed her brows.

"…Though my ability can still work, it feels like it's been forcefully redirected. Even if we teleport we'll probably be buried underground."

"As a member of the board of directors, and also as a weapons specialist, he should understand my military value. Then he should know the underlings of that standard cannot possibly take me down."

Accelerator said with a bored voice disdainfully.

"But, if they got a sample of my AIM diffusion field from previous battles, they could reverse calculate from the data and then send out disruptive electrical

waves. With the progress from the data analysis they could at least force our abilities to go berserk and take me and Musujime down. That's the plan of those bastards."

"Then what do we do?"

Oyafune Monaka's expression seemed slightly tense, and she asked with a voice that should be far removed from battle.

"Isn't that obvious?"

In contrast, Accelerator twisted his neck and made some cracking sounds. He placed his hands on his neck.

There was the switch for the electrode on his neck.

"We'll break through head on."

Part 6

As one of the official members of the board of directors, Shiokishi was well-known for being well-protected. That was apparent from the fact that he covered himself in a powered suit almost 24 hours a day. Of course, his stronghold was also quite robust. Mixed in with other buildings in District 2, the tunnel style building was 200m in diameter and was said to be able to withstand even tactical weapons.

It was just that,

"That level of strength is still not enough."

Accelerator's low voice was carried off by the winds.

"When facing a place that boasts to be able to withstand even nuclear strikes, you'll have to use something like this."

Boom!! An explosion rang out.

The front half of the tunnel had one third of it smashed apart, and debris flew through the air.

What Accelerator had done was very simple. He picked up a parked car close to him with one hand, and then threw it hard at the target. There was nothing special about the laws of physics involved, and the items used weren't any kind of special materials. But, with just 'controlling all vectors' added into the mix, a simple throw could bring the results of shattering the shelter.

"Let's go."

The person in question muttered that one phrase in a bored tone, and turned his electrode off. To conserve the batteries as much as possible, the Level 5 could only stumble forward using his crutch as support. But nobody could stop him. The gigantic shock wave from when the shelter had destroyed the joints of the powered suits, flipped over the tanks, and robbed the soldiers of their consciousness.

Accelerator walked over the broken walls and walked inside the facility.

"Shiokishi's forces will take another 10 to 20 minutes before they can get back up. We'll use this time to take control of Shiokishi and force him to surrender."

"How troublesome. If you can shoot that move repeatedly why don't you just squash him from afar?"

Musujime asked him using the same bored tone, but Accelerator replied with a scowl.

"Even if I squash him that will be after we get the information about Dragon out of him."

"U-um…"

Oyafune who was with them looked back repeatedly.

"Tsuchimikado-san has disappeared."

“That guy is outside holding off the enemies. We can’t be sure if they are all immobilized, or that if there will be pursuers.”

“Since me and Accelerator have some trouble due to our AIM diffusion field being diagnosed, that guy with glasses doesn’t rely on his ability so there is no problems.”

Though Oyafune had an expression that asked if he would be alright by himself, neither Accelerator or Musujime cared. If he died, then anything to do with him would end right there. Their Group was a group that banded together based on strength. Only by shutting up and showing your worth were you counted as part of Group.

Accelerator’s blow had made the tunnels messy. In this tunnel that looked like an omelet being randomly taken apart by a fork, Accelerator and others forged ahead. They ignored the concept of ‘normal’ routes. They moved between the destroyed, collapsed, and forcibly ripped apart walls and moved deeper and deeper inside.

On their way they occasionally saw men who looked like Shiokishi’s private forces lying down on the floor. They had probably been knocked unconscious by the shock wave from Accelerator’s previous attack.

“Now it’s really the ‘observation’ we were talking about earlier. Talking directly with Shiokishi is Oyafune’s job, we’re just here as her bodyguards.”

“Even though we’re the ones that broke everything from the base to here, ultimately she is the one that has to step up on the battlefield.”

As Musujime said that, an unforeseen event happened.

Suddenly, a barricade descended like a guillotine, separating Oyafune Monaka from Accelerator and Musujime Awaki, and perfectly sealing the path.

“Musujime!!”

“!!”

Her ability was to move others freely, ignoring the limits of 3-dimensions. But, Musujime looked at the barricade and shook her head.

“There’s no response. Something has happened on the other side of the barricade, Oyafune’s no longer there.”

“Che. You’re useless.”

Just as Accelerator was reaching for the electrode at his neck, a new sound of footsteps rang out.

“Let us spar with one another.”

The one who spoke was a man in a suit. Accelerator had seen him before. He was the private mercenary working for Shiokishi that used a large caliber handgun and had killed every last member of Spark Signal back at the District 3 private salon. His name should be Sugitani.

Sugitani took out a packet of cigarettes from a pocket in his suit and used his mouth to take out one from the packet.

“I remember I prayed that we wouldn’t see each other on the battlefield once more.”

“You’re the one that’s picking a fight here.”

“I’ve said before the one that should work to prevent this from happening is you.”

To light up his cigarette Sugitani, returned the packet of cigarettes back into his suit, and took out a lighter that even with a glance it was apparent it was a cheap item. It was a lighter made of clear plastic even sold in corner stores, and didn’t match his attire or the current atmosphere.

“Do you know about Dragon?”

“I know.”

Sugitani replied as he brought the lighter up to light the cigarette.

At least, that was how it appeared to Accelerator.

However, right after that was a small *pu* sound, like something had been shot out.

At the same time Sugitani's lighter made that sound, Musujime Awaki collapsed onto the floor next to Accelerator as if something had hit her. There wasn't even a scream. Because of that inexplicable hit Musujime had completely lost consciousness.

(So what's inside that isn't gas used for lighters…)

Chances were some kind of high pressure gas was used inside the lighter, and it had been released all at once to shoot a small anesthetic bullet. Sugitani, who had successfully completely a sneak attack head on, spat out the cigarette used for the act onto the ground and said to Accelerator,

"The basis for modern warfare isn't fight with all you have head on, but to decide victory or defeat before then."

"…"

"This is Shiokishi's order. Compared to Accelerator who only has massive destructive power, Musujime can go through any walls and has a higher priority to be taken down first."

"Who are you?"

"Koga. One of Koga's descendants."

Sugitani said in a self-mocking tone.

"That's an organization of contemptible people who did things like this under the name of justice since ages past."

As he said that he took out a large caliber handgun.

But, that probably wasn't the real killing move. Considering how he had fought so far, he probably wouldn't use something this simple.

Or, it was because there were other tricks he was going to shoot from head-on.

He was the kind of enemy that used chained plots.

Facing Accelerator who was trying not to leave himself open by observing his enemy closely, Sugitani spoke,

“Oyafune’s doomed.”

That one sentence made Accelerator frown involuntarily.

“Those two old folks from the board of directors have already met face to face, and Shiokishi is wearing a specially made powered suit. The strength of that armor isn’t something that can be handled by any weapon Oyafune is hiding in her clothing. That old woman will be ripped apart by a power greater than construction-use machinery and then die.”

“I don’t think Shiokishi would allow his own life be included in the plan.”

“That’s just something I wanted to do. Also, Shiokishi is probably shocked right now, but he should be able to do what he has to. I don’t think a man wearing a powered suit will lose to an old woman.”

Sugitani wasn’t showing off his victory, he was just stating the facts.

“Only by eliminating Oyafune can any political opposition be eliminated. Then you people will be chased out of here using the entire might of Academy City; then through proper channels we’ll control ‘trump cards’ like Last Order and the battle will be over.”

Part 7

Two people from the highest governing body of Academy City—the board of directors—were currently facing each other.

Between them was a table.

Though some points should have be taken off because there was no tea or

biscuits on the table, at least the atmosphere of an upper-class conversation was established. Thanks to Accelerator's attack earlier, the walls were cracked and the starry sky seen through the cracks could at least count as some kind of decoration.

Oyafune and Shiokishi.

These two old people who were closely involved in many things in history were currently wearing warm smiles.

"Mm. What I want is very simple. It's not money; it's not power; it's not even your life."

The one that lit up the fuse first was Oyafune.

"From now on, I wish for you to completely delete the clause of 'using others' lives as a resource' from all the plans you are supervising and the ones you propose, and also in your battles. It's not much, right? Apart from you, everyone else is following this principle."

Indeed, what she was suggesting did sound easy at first.

But, Oyafune Monaka was likely to make Shiokishi 'completely' implement those words. Just signing something like a verbal agreement along the lines of 'understood, I'll agree to not do that anymore' would not be enough. If Shiokishi did not disband his personal forces under his command, and on that basis forfeit all other rights and powers to do with commanding armed forces, Oyafune would not let it end.

That way would mean taking everything that Shiokishi had away from him.

As if declaring everything that made him great would be taken away from him and make him a cripple.

"Also, let's talk about Dragon."

"Is that something necessary for you to ask about it?"

"Rather than me, it's my allies Group who requested me to ask about it."

Shiokishi went silent for a moment. Then, through his powered suit's helmet, he looked at Oyafune sitting in front of him and asked,

"Oyafune-kun, how much do you know about Dragon?"

"Nothing whatsoever. If my power was authorizing documents I might have chances to come in contact with some kind of information. But, I don't have that kind of power. You should know that as well."

"It's something that cannot be brought into the light."

Shiokishi didn't care about being disagreed with, he only said in a small voice,

"All I am doing now is completing one very important thing for protecting Academy City. Dragon is a word that has that kind of danger. You called me barbaric, but that is because you don't know about Dragon. Also, I don't plan on letting you know."

"Same here."

Oyafune didn't change her soft smile, and replied immediately,

"If necessary, I will also take action that could be called barbaric. If it can contribute to saving important people from your actions I will continue to investigate Dragon."

"Then this negotiation has broken down."

"I think, the Academy City that we both want to protect probably means different things to the two of us. That's why our paths have diverged."

"Is that so."

Shiokishi sighed a small sigh behind the helmet.

Boom!!

Right after that, Shiokishi punched an iron fist made from a special alloy with all the power of the powered suit towards Oyafune.

The powered suit that Shiokishi was wearing was a special version above even the military-use models in Academy City. Instead of focusing on flexibility and the weapon's coordination, this suit's design focused more on durability and defense as its core. This also showed just how strong the fist that was reaching for Oyafune really was.

Even building machineries could not be compared to this.

The old woman would undoubtedly be turned to dust with this blow.

However,

"…Have you never considered?"

Not only did Oyafune Monaka's body not get turned into paste, there wasn't even a scratch on her.

She neither caught Shiokishi's fist or made any move to dodge. The iron fist of the powered suit abruptly stopped in midair. The armor seemed like it had suddenly lost the ability to move, and turned into a heavy metal statue.

"Just like how you wrapped yourself up with a powered suit, there's a possibility for Oyafune Monaka to make plans to preserve her own life."

"Wh…at…?"

In the old woman's hands there was a dagger made of obsidian.

Due to the damage Accelerator had done to the shelter, there was a crack in the ceiling and the light of Venus shone down from there. And this artifact could reflect the light of Venus to disintegrate any object.

Although, that obviously wasn't a possession of Oyafune Monaka's.

The old woman moved her hands to her face.

The skin on the surface was peeled off like a mask. Though for an instant brown skin could be seen, this person whose identity was unknown immediately put on another face.

At this time, the one that was standing in front of Shiokishi was…

"Unabara, Mitsuki…"

"Oya, is saying that name alright? I had thought you would definitely call me Etzali."

Unabara slightly weighed the dagger in his hands while answering.

At this time, the powered suit that was protecting Shiokishi started to crumble. All the screws had fallen off, the gap between steel plates started to widen, and gears and motors started to fall all over the place.

The old man in a tuxedo didn't take long from being encased in armor to being

completely exposed to the outside air. Looking at Shiokishi breaking cold sweat at the loss of his protection, Unabara scorned him in a mocking tone,

“Though you are indeed fortunate. If the effective area of this ‘Spear’ covered your body, you would have ‘fallen apart’ by now.”

“If that happened before we get the information about Dragon out of you, it will be troublesome for us,” he added.

On the other hand, Shiokishi was shaking off the remains of his armor.

“In the end… all that coward Oyafune did was just looking on from the sides…!”

“Is that so?”

Unabara’s eyes narrowed slightly.

His expression was like someone had just insulted a person that he approved of and held in high regards.

“My charm uses human skin as raw material, but Oyafune didn’t hesitate. Even if it’s just the arm, but I think ripping off 10cm of skin would be extremely painful.”

Unabara holding onto the obsidian dagger moved closer step by step.

“Let us talk about Dragon. Or, do you want to clench your teeth and experience the pain that the one you called a coward, Oyafune, experienced?”

“Urgh… Minobe!”

Shiokishi moved backwards and pressed a button that he had hidden in his tuxedo from earlier.

A door next to them opened and two burly men stepped out. One of them was probably the so-called ‘Minobe’.

Just like a shield protecting Shiokishi, they stepped in front of Unabara.

“Did you think my security detail only included Sugitani?”

Shiokishi drew up an unnatural smile on his stiff face.

“To prevent the people around me from betraying me, the guards are split into ‘Sugitani group’ and ‘Minobe group’. If anything happens, they will kill off each other… You might be someone with battle capabilities, but this isn’t something you alone can handle.”

Taking the chance of the two burly men holding Unabara off, Shiokishi tried to escape by himself.

Unabara’s expression stiffened.

But, as he ran towards the exit Shiokishi stopped at the threshold. He stood there in shock as he looked at something.

“Why?”

Shiokishi turned around once more, forgetting about trying to escape.

Shiokishi directed his query towards the two burly men that were his bodyguards.

“Why is it apart from you two, everyone else is dead?!”

One of the two large men opened his mouth.

However, he didn’t reply to Shiokishi’s question. The man only looked towards Unabara’s face and said,

“This is surprising early, Etzali.”

A dull sound rang out.

The member of the board of directors—Shiokishi’s stomach had something else stuck in it. A dagger. A dagger that somebody had thrown. But it was different from a normal dagger made of steel. It was a dagger used by a specific tribe, made from polishing obsidian stone.

It was not something that belonged to Unabara.

The person that had thrown it was someone that should have been protecting Shiokishi, the man called Minobe.

Looking at the dagger that was planted in him by a person that didn't even turn to look at him, Shiokishi stood in shock. Then his body leaned to the side and fell.

The name Etzali.

And obsidian, a choice that was far less reasonable than metal.

"Can it be…!"

"Have you never considered this before?"

The two burly men both placed their hands on their faces.

"That someone else would use the same method you used to infiltrate into the dark side of Academy City?"

The skin on the surface was peeled back. After that, what showed was someone else's face. The physique and gender swiftly changed along with the face. This was a phenomenon exactly the same as Unabara's—the phenomenon of using Aztec magic.

What appeared was a man somewhere between 25 to 30 years old, and a girl around 15.

"Tecpatl… Tochtli!!"

Tecpatl, in the organization Unabara… Etzali used to belong to, he was the man in charge of military planning. And Tochtli was once a comrade of Xochitl.

"Our original plan was to infiltrate the depths of Shiokishi's guards, and ultimately replace Shiokishi. But that guy never takes off his powered suit. If we forcibly broke that suit of armor apart, the sensors would alert Sugitani. Just as we were troubled by that, you invaded here. That's how it is."

The brown-skinned male, Tecpatl, looked at Unabara's face, and spoke in an indifferent tone.

"If Shiokishi was taken down there is no point replacing him. Just as I planned to abandon all this… in the end we picked up an amazing souvenir."

"…Even if you take my head back to the Organization, I doubt it will bring any good."

"No no, that won't be the case."

Tecpatl shrugged.

"Because, our goal for infiltrating into the core of Academy City and replacing Shiokishi, was ultimately to find where you were hiding in the dark side and execute you. But, since you joined something called Group, normal methods of intelligence gathering couldn't find your whereabouts. … In other words, all we have to do is take your head and everything will be fine."

Part 8

Musujime Awaki had already been taken out.

So, the only ones fighting were Sugitani and Accelerator. Staring at the assassin calling himself a descendant of Koga, Accelerator touched the electrode switch on his neck.

"There's no problem killing you here, right?"

"No problem at all; I'm not small-minded to the point where I'll get mad because of some dream-talk."

The two of them charged ahead at the same time.

Accelerator controlled the vectors under his feet and charged like a bullet towards his opponent; on the other hand, Sugitani took a lot of lighters from his

pocket. He threw these modified lighters that were locked at releasing gas in front of him, and then threw the still-lit cigarette into them.

Boom!! A wall of fire shot up in the half-ruined corridor.

But, that didn't work when faced with Accelerator's 'Reflect'.

He unhesitatingly charged through the wall of fire,

(There's no one here?)

Accelerator lost his target and suddenly braked. But it was too late. Sugitani used the smokescreen and nimbly moved behind Accelerator.

"I remember that Kihara Amata once used the technique of drawing back his fist an instant before receiving impact to break through the reflection obstacle."

"!?"

The voice came from his blind spot, along with a fist.

Accelerator flew backwards in a hurry.

"Also, Kakine Teitoku seemed to have used materials that don't exist in this world to create vectors that don't exist in this world."

However, the voice and fist followed closely after him.

Sugitani used footwork beyond the limits of a human that was almost like sliding to keep himself in the same distance between him and Accelerator.

After that, a 'boom' rang out.

Accelerator's face was feeling some numbing pain, while Sugitani jumped out of the ring for the first time in this battle.

"So that's it."

Sugitani shook his wrist.

It seemed to have sprained, the joints had swelled up a lot.

“Those special exceptions are all results of their own specialized fields. Just by observing them I can’t perfectly recreate their techniques.”

Even so, to have struck Accelerator’s head without any abilities needed top level skills. For any normal grunt that attacked, it wouldn’t just stop at a swollen hand, they would be hurt to the extent of losing control of their own blood stream and have their internal organs shattered.

“You scumbag,”

After calmly analyzing, Accelerator said scornfully.

“Even if you have some skill, in the end you’re just following the orders from a scheming old man. For a bastard like that, you actually still have the face to say something like being a ‘descendant of people that serve in the name of justice’?”

“…”

“Does that bastard Shiokishi look like a good person? It’s right for you to serve him? Don’t make me laugh, it’s obvious to anyone.”

“… Indeed, the term ‘justice’ is always being used by those in position of power. Even if that is not the case, a perfect standard for justice does not exist.”

But, Sugitani unhesitatingly added,

“Then, by giving everything to Evil won’t every last problem on Earth be solved just like that?”

Accelerator and Sugitani glared at each other.

Feeling the look of ‘Evil’, ‘Good’ faced it head on and argued,

“Stop joking. All your ‘Evil’ can do is pick at the scraps left behind by ‘Good’. With your level only at stopping two or three tragedies, you want to defeat us who face hundreds and thousands of tragedies on a regular basis? You people are merely scavengers, do you truly believe that the scraps you pick up are enough to satisfy the entire world?”

“Bastard,”

Hearing those words, Accelerator replied in the same mocking manner,

“From the moment you thought that these scraps were insignificant, your ‘Good’ was no longer truly good.”

“Truly good?”

Sugitani’s brows narrowed.

“Are you saying that even a villain like you know a Good person?”

“…”

The reply this time was a bit hesitating.

“Of course I do… and familiar to the point where my head hurts just thinking about that guy.”

“Is that so.”

Sugitani said that while reaching inside his pocket.

“But, you’ll never meet with that Good person you know ever again… because you will die here.”

Right after that,

Accelerator’s choker suddenly lost its capabilities.

The Strongest Level 5 of Academy City fell onto the floor. He struggled to move his limbs, but it didn’t do anything.

“As you are right now, you probably can’t even understand human speech. Your choker has been modified into something that can be remotely controlled. As long as we cut you off from the Misaka Network, you have zero battle potential.”

At this point, Sugitani's eyes moved to look at Accelerator's crutch.

It looked different to what the data had said. It had been modified somewhat, probably to allow the user to stand up by himself even if the choker lost power completely. Though it didn't seem to do much at this point.

"This is my 'Good.'"

While he was saying that, Sugitani took out a large caliber handgun.

It was the gun that had killed off every last terrorist back at the District 3 private salon. To kill Accelerator who had lost his Reflect, it only needed one shot.

"This is the method of a man who lives in a world of despicable people yet still follows justice."

Don!! A deafening gunshot rang out.

Part 9

Stephanie Gorgeouspalace pulled the trigger of her light machine shotgun.

The unrefined mass of metal shined eerily in the reflections of the flames spilling throughout the underground mall. At a range of 10 meters, the storm of bullets held enough power to blow away a normal armored vehicle in a few seconds. It would truly make it look like a spread out diagram of the sides of a die.

Kinuhata Saiai protected her body with the ability known as Offense Armor, but that had its limits.

By creating repeated explosions from propane tanks, Stephanie had blown the air away briefly creating an extremely small vacuum near Kinuhata. In that vacuum, she had no barrier of nitrogen. Stephanie's bullets would pass right through.

Stephanie had not hesitated.

She had pulled the trigger to spray bullets in through that momentary opening.

The powerful storm of bullets whipped up the surrounding air, swallowed up the black smoke, and even caused the wall of flames to waver. The repeated gunshots drowned out all other noise as the lead bullets cut into the area Kinuhata was in. It was clearly a fatal blow, but Stephanie did not stop there. She continued holding down the trigger letting more and more and more bullets fly.

It may have been hard to tell because she was using a monstrous weapon like the light machine shotgun, but Stephanie Gorgeouspalace's fighting style was based on an Anti-Skill foundation.

The stronger an esper was, the more irregular their fighting style tended to become, but she was the opposite. However, that did not mean that her skill was average or ordinary.

Humans could perfect their foundations over many years getting rid of what wasn't needed. It was clear just how strong one would become if they did that.

In other words, her bullets all accurately attacked her target without wasting any.

She heard a male voice coming from another part of the underground mall cut off by the barrier of flames.

"K-Kinu-Kinuhataaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!"

It was as if the boy were giving her death cry for her.

Stephanie's face did not brighten up.

It wasn't that she thought she had failed. She couldn't see due to the flames and smoke, but Kinuhata Saiai's body had surely been turned to mincemeat.

She didn't like that it had been so easy.

She was taking revenge for Sunazara Chimitsu, but it had ended so simply.

She was supposed to have caused much, much, much more pain.

Why had it ended so simply?

“…This has to be a fucking joke.” Stephanie heard a grinding noise as she clenched her teeth so tightly she thought her skull would bend. “This isn’t how I wanted to take you out. This is only the beginning! Don’t end this here!! You’re the one who took out Sunazara-san! He wouldn’t die this easily!! Suffer more! Beg for your life more!! Stand up! Stand up and let me kill you!! Keep coming back to life so I can kill you 1000 tiiiiiiimmmmmeeeessssss!!!!!”

The power behind the bullets caused a gust of wind as if the air were expanding.

The black smoke struck her face and she inhaled it through her nose causing her to cough. She finally let go of the light machine shotgun’s trigger.

The wall of black smoke started to clear up.

What was behind it started to become visible.

“It can’t end like this,” Stephanie spat out.

And then a gunshot rang out.

Accompanying that single gunshot, a bullet hole opened up in Stephanie’s gut.

She then saw Kinuhata Saiai on the other side of the smoke holding out a handgun.

“What…?”

With a look of surprise, Stephanie stared at Kinuhata.

The girl was not unscathed. She had a large bruise on her small face as if she had been punched and there was blood oozing from her bared thighs, but that was it. She had none of the wounds one would expect from the light machine shotgun. Her flesh, bones, and organs had not been torn to pieces.

Stephanie could not understand.

She decided to aim her gun back at Kinuhata.

However, the single bullet had dulled her movements more than she had

expected.

Before she could aim the light machine shotgun's barrel, Kinuhata fired again. A second and then a third bullet struck Stephanie's arms and the giant gun slid across the floor.

"You said you didn't want me to die, but it looks more like it was super trouble for you."

"How…?" Stephanie asked.

She then noticed something on the ground. It was a metal can about the size of a can of hairspray. However, the metal looked thicker than one would expect from its size. The can was split open from the inside as if it hadn't been able to withstand the internal pressure.

The surface of the metal can had a letter of the alphabet carved into it.

Stephanie interpreted it as an atomic symbol.

"…Liquid nitrogen…!?"

"Is it really that surprising? If you insulate it with a super vacuum between the barriers, it isn't that hard to walk around with."

Basically, Kinuhata had brought the liquid nitrogen out into the air which was at a normal temperature to instantly provide herself with a large amount of nitrogen to make up for the local vacuum Stephanie had created.

While still holding out her gun, Kinuhata smiled thinly.

"I'm an esper that manipulates nitrogen. But that also means that I super can't do anything else. Did you really think someone who super understood that she was defenseless without nitrogen would not have come up with a countermeasure? And I'm a member of Academy City's dark side. It isn't hard at all to get the things I super need."

The light machine shotgun lying on the ground became surrounded in flames which caused the ammunition inside to burst.

But Kinuhata did not look in its direction.

“As a former member of Anti-Skill, you were indeed super well versed in fighting with espers and you had the ability to see my weakness. However, you did not understand that I am a person who has super struggled to continue winning and surviving.”

As she spoke, Kinuhata put her handgun away.

She wasn’t mercifully letting Stephanie live.

She just wanted to finish her off with the ability she had the most confidence in.

“Oh, right,” she said as if they were words of farewell. “An esper with a powerful shield who can grab a car and super throw it is almost invincible in close quarters combat. The worst kind of opponent for me is a sniper who super accurately attacks from a position I can’t reach. …Instead of someone who’s nothing but firepower like you, Sunazara Chimitsu is much more dangerous.”

Stephanie tried to pull her spare handgun out from the back of her belt.

But Kinuhata was faster.

She aimed for Stephanie with her arm that could easily lift up a car.

Part 10

The man that in actuality controlled the Aztec ‘organization’, Tecpatl.

He had with him a girl who was once a comrade of Xochitl—Tochtli, and he appeared in front of Unabara. Just to eliminate Unabara who had turned traitor.

This was such a bizarre combination—that was what Unabara’s intuition was

telling him.

Tochtli and Tecpatl shouldn’t have been the kind of people that would get along well. The kind of trust where they could trust each other with their backs even when besieged by death on all sides did not exist between them, could that be replaced with their place on the command structure?

However, that was not the most important thing right now.

“…”

Unabara subconsciously looked at the obsidian dagger in his hand.

The Spear of Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli.

It was an artifact that took apart any armor that had come in contact with the light of Venus. Its effect was the same on the human body. Once a person’s body came in contact with the Spear of Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli, the human’s flesh and bone would be taken apart cleanly.

Could he do it?

Even though they had gone their separate ways, those two had once been his comrades. Could he really use this against them?

“Oi Oi.”

Facing Unabara who was still hesitating, Tecpatl wasn’t worried in the slightest.

“Is using something that puny really alright? … I thought you would have definitely used ‘something like this’.”

As he spoke, Tecpatl took something from Tochtli’s hands.

It looked like a student’s bookbag, a rectangular object.

Underneath it were thin and long creases, like those on a freshly baked loaf of bread. From inside the bag, several stone tablets only a few millimeters thick stretched out.

Densely carved onto it was the medium that the Aztecs used to convey written

information—something that could be called words, symbols, or even pictures.

(Can it be…?!)

At the same time a chill covered the entirety of Unabara's body, the depths of his mind were suddenly stimulated by something. It was the sharp pain the brain let out when it was corroded by knowledge that shouldn't be known.

To him, this wasn't the first time he had felt that sensation.

As if to confirm the hypothesis in his heart, Tecpatl said with a smile,

"Yes, this is a grimoire 'original'."

Looking at the dizzy Unabara shaking his head to try and stay conscious, Tecpatl continued to smile and say,

"By now you should know the fact that Xochitl had been 'remodelled' and had a 'grimoire original' inserted into her. In this situation where even the common soldier is armed with grimoires, me, the person that thought up this plan and implemented it, having a grimoire shouldn't be something unthinkable."

"You…"

"Show your grimoire to us. We know Xochitl is still alive, so the grimoire original would have been taken off her by you… I'll say this first, my grimoire isn't weak enough to be taken apart by the obsidian dagger."

(… They actually brought 'grimoire originals' into battle? Damn it, the words on that stone tablet are…)

He didn't want to read it again. What Unabara was doing now was like tasting the poison that was sticking to his brain and couldn't be removed, analyzing in his head the 'grimoire original' that Tecpatl was using.

It was probably the Calendar Stone.

That was the gigantic round stone that recorded the complicated calendar of the Aztecs, in addition to the process that the world would destroy and reborn itself.

What had been buried into Xochitl was a derivative of that Calendar Stone. The grimoire that Tecpatl wielded was probably a grimoire that focused on another derivative.

Unabara raised his head.

As he tried not to focus his consciousness on Tecpatl's grimoire, he said,

"Is that the records about the Moon Rabbit…"

"You actually tried to 'read' this thing? You're a surprisingly rash person."

Tecpatl had done something to make sure the knowledge of the stone tablet didn't enter his head. He casually tapped the stone tablet and said,

"It's the story about the time when the fifth sun was created. The moon that was born at the same time, its light was brighter than what the gods expected—to the point where the sun and the moon couldn't be distinguished from one another. To avoid that, the gods threw rabbits towards the moon to weaken its glow… using that legend, things like this can be achieved."

Before his voice had even ceased,

Boom!

Something shot out of Tecpatl's hand, and the walls on this side of the shelter were smashed apart from the inside.

This blow easily pierced through a shelter that was capable of stopping a nuclear bomb, and directly hit the private forces of Shiokishi that were fighting outside.

"Don't dodge it."

Tecpatl said while smiling.

"You see, if you dodge a few dozen people outside will die. Originally this should be a strike that can reach other astral bodies… guess the 'rabbit bones' that were used as the raw material are just inferior."

Unabara was shocked.

However, he wasn’t shocked by the destructive force of that last attack.

What he was staring at was Tochtli who was next to Tecpatl.

Her index finger was drooping like a squid’s feelers, and shaking.

“… What have you done?”

Unabara asked with trembling lips.

“What have you done to Tochtli?!”

“The ‘rabbit bones’. You can't understand if I don’t spell it out for you?”

What Tecpatl had used was some sort of projectile attack. Add to that the term ‘rabbit bones’, it was not hard to think of what had just happened.

(Why would Tochtli obediently…)

Unabara stared at the brown-skinned girl with justified question in his eyes. At this time, Tochtli opened her mouth. What came out of it was,

“… … ah, … awa… … ugu…”

This time, all warmth suddenly disappeared from Unabara’s back.

It couldn’t be called human speech. The brain that was used for thinking and the heart, none of it was left. Looking at Unabara who was shocked speechless, Tecpatl finally laughed like he couldn’t hold it in anymore.

Why would she help him to that extent.

Tochtli and Tecpatl were obviously two people that could not cooperate together.

The answer was very simple.

No matter what,

If they were a normal person, who would offer their bones to someone else without anesthesia?

“Hahahaha! Look how interesting she is. There are not even half of her bones remaining inside her body. Even though the grimoire recorded ways to replace human bones with obsidian, I’m told the process is excruciating. And yet I just fired one like that. Eh, to me, as long as the ‘rabbit bones’ can be replaced it’ll be alright.”

“Tec, patl…”

Unabara’s lips couldn’t stop trembling.

In this time, the squid-like finger of Tochtli started to swell up from the inside, and forcibly recovered its original shape. Where the bone had been brutally removed, the obsidian filled it up savagely.

Just what kind of pain would that be like??!!

Just what kind of shame would that be like??!!

“Tecpatl!!!!!!!!”

Unabara roared in his rage, and moved his hand towards his face.

He roughly ripped off the skin covering his face, and his brown face was exposed to the air.

Resonating to his anger, something moved.

The scroll grimoire opened by itself from inside Unabara’s bosom, and stretched out. Unabara directed his will to control the snake-like flying scroll.

Unabara's… grimoire that had been buried inside Xochitl had 'counter-attack against weapon wielders' inscribed on it. She might have built a spell that forced weapon-wielders to commit suicide, but Unabara couldn't use spells of that magnitude yet.

Tecpatl's… grimoire that was using up Tochtli's bones, what was inscribed on it was 'long distance bombardment'. Using the legend of throwing rabbits at astral bodies as the basis, this grimoire specialized in this spell that could destroy any of the enemy's flying spells or enchantments.

A conflict between grimoires.

The Unabara no longer remember any restrictions. Because of that, he stepped into the territory that Tecpatl didn't dare step into. In his boiling brain, only 'defeat Tecpatl' remained.

"Good."

As someone who also wielded a grimoire that was derived from the Calendar Stone, Tecpatl laid his hands on his grimoire and said,

"Now this is a battle between us. Let us exhaust our wisdom and fight for the position of the Aztec's helmsman."

Boom! An explosion rang out.

Several flashes of light erupted from Tecpatl's hand, while Unabara's scroll of skin expanded widely and intercepted them. As a counter attack, the countless powder that was stuck onto the skin turned into a gale and attempted to blow away the stone tablets.

The shockwaves from their attacks alone was enough to inflate the tunnels of the entire shelter.

It was not an easy battle. It was already far beyond Unabara's original estimations.

Even so, it couldn’t be simply said that the grimoire was his helper.

(… Urgh, damn it, a headache…?!)

As they battled knowledge continuously flowed into his brain. At the same time it brought him intense pain all over his body. As he endured all that, Unabara waved his grimoire.

Grimoires would help those who would spread its knowledge. And so, it was not solely a weapon that belonged to its wielder. If someone more suitable than its current wielder appeared, it would mercilessly kill the ‘now-useless person’ and move onto the next one.

Just like a ‘trial’.

No matter if it was life or death, the grimoires would make the choice that would benefit itself.

(… It doesn’t matter…)

Unabara clenched his teeth.

In the gaps between his teeth, bright red blood flowed out.

(… I have someone who I must defeat, for that I would even sacrifice this body of mine!)

But, just spirit alone would not be enough to decide victory or defeat.

Tecpatl’s hand continued to release flashes of light, until finally it surpassed the limits of Unabara’s defense. A few bullets of light went past the shield of flying scroll, and impacted Unabara’s torso directly. It was only due to his grimoire’s protection that his body wasn’t torn apart. He rolled several times on the ground before coming to a stop.

Unfortunately, he no longer had the strength to stand up.

Tecpatl approached Unabara who was unraveling the scroll head on.

“The gap of experience between yours and mine is too large. Secondly, your

protection measures when using the grimoire are too inferior. If you plan to use these grimoires as weapons, taking measures to prevent knowledge flowing in reverse is the most basic precaution.”

“…”

Even when being glared at by Unabara, Tecpatl didn’t change his expression.

Light started to gather into his hand.

It was the light created by Tochtli’s bones.

“What… happened?”

“You’re asking that?”

Tecpatl laughed.

“A war ended. The war between us and those uncouth people who called themselves ‘World Police’. I once believed that once that battle was over we would be able to live peacefully. That’s why I supported the war.”

The laughter continued.

“But nothing changed. Our status, our position, nothing changed. We fought hard, and in the end was it only to preserve the interests of a few old men that ruled over us?”

That laughter finally broke.

“Those old folks who stirred us up with nothing but lies have all been eliminated. But, even though we punished them severely, it didn’t change anything. Like that, we lost our compass and goal. We no longer know where to go!”

Boom! An explosive sound cracked out.

This time, the attack from Tecpatl’s hand was a fatal one.

But, Unabara didn’t die.

The strike from Tecpatl’s hand curved and pierced through his own body.

“… Huh…?”

Looking at the large hole on his abdomen, Tecpatl let out a moan. On the other side, Unabara only lied on the ground and asked in a calm voice,

“Did you know? Grimoires aren’t just simple tools or weapons. They have a trait of helping those who can spread the knowledge within them the most, and if necessary they will bare their fangs to even their wielder.”

At this time, Tecpatl saw it.

Unabara drew something with his own blood on the ground. They were the words on the stone tablet. As Unabara was copying the grimoire ‘original’, creating a ‘script’ of the grimoire and passing the knowledge of the grimoire on, Tecpatl had attacked Unabara. Therefore, the grimoire ‘original’ had launched its own counter-attack.

“… If you truly were suitable for the knowledge of that grimoire original, you would not have ended up like this. To prevent the contamination of the grimoire original, you took measures preventing it. Forget about spreading its knowledge, you wouldn’t even read the knowledge within it yourself. Did you believe that the grimoire would allow itself to become a ‘dead end’? …”

There was no reply.

Kneeling on his knees, Tecpatl finally fell weakly onto the floor. The ‘student’s bag’ with many stone tablets in it casted an eerie, long shadow. It looked like it was waving at him. *Accept, or die*. Unabara seemed to feel its declaration.

(… From the looks of this, I’m really popular with these grimoire originals.)

“… Alright…”

Unabara Mitsuki answered the question the grimoire original raised.

A second grimoire. The speed of the contamination would increase even faster,

but Unabara didn’t hesitate.

“However,”

He removed his gaze from Tecpatl. Once more entering his field of vision was a girl that couldn’t even understand human speech—Tochtli.

He didn’t have any obligation to do this much.

But, if he didn’t do this he wouldn’t have face to go back to Xochitl.

“Before this, there’s something I need your help with.”

Contract established.

In order to recover a girl’s life, Unabara Mitsuki stepped into a deeper darkness.

Part 11

Sugitani stood wordlessly with his large-caliber gun pointed ahead.

On the ground lay Accelerator.

The unique smell of gunpowder exploding entered his nostril.

And mixed with it was the smell of blood.

However,

It was not Accelerator’s.

Sugitani had held the absolute advantage, but now had a hole in his stomach.

“Why…”

Sugitani started to falter.

He leaned on the walls, and finally lost his strength and slowly sank onto the ground.

In sharp contrast to him, Accelerator neatly got up from the ground. To be able to do that kind of movement when he had lost the help from his choker was unthinkable. But, the remote control in Sugitani's hands was operating right now, there should be no way he could use his choker…

"You saw that my crutch has been modified, right?"

Accelerator said disdainfully to Sugitani.

"The additional legs to aid walking and the motor, all those are just part of the disguise. What this thing really is, is something that blocks other interference devices."

"What did you say?"

"If this thing just blocked other wavelengths, and it ended up blocking off the Misaka Network then it'd be useless. So, I was waiting for you guys to use that kind of wavelength on me. Then, after careful analysis of that wavelength and using the equipment in this cane, an interference wavelength can be reverse-engineered to specifically block that wavelength."

That's right.

When the limo had been attacked, Shiokishi's forces had used the 'long distance controlling wavelength'. Accelerator at the time had taken the opportunity to take a sample of the wavelength his enemy used.

Now that 'long distance controlling wavelength' was blocked by his crutch, and couldn't reach the choker.

So, Accelerator didn't lose his ability, and he could still walk and talk.

He took out the gun in his holster, and pointed it at Sugitani.

"This is how Evil does things."

The monster said in a bored tone.

“There’s no difference between you and me. I’m definitely not a ‘good person’, so for you who uses the same methods, you’re also an exceptional villain.”

Being told that, Sugitani involuntarily smiled slightly.

Right after that, both of them unhesitatingly pulled the trigger.

Gunshots rang out.

Accelerator’s bullets sank into Sugitani, while Sugitani’s bullets were all ‘reflected’ away.

“… How boring.”

Turning his choker back to its normal mode, Accelerator walked further into the depths.

“If you call yourself a ‘good person’, then try harder in your actions.”

Sugitani had taken a few bullets, and though he lost consciousness, was still breathing heavily.

This was his way of Evil.

Part 12

Kinuhata sat on the floor of the underground mall breathing in the air heated by the flames.

Stephanie was collapsed nearby.

It seemed Hamazura and Takitsubo were on the other side of the wall of flames, but it would be a pain to break through to meet up with them. It would be better

to head to the surface separately and meet up there.

Kinuhata rubbed her injured cheek and then looked over at Stephanie.

“…Even if you were up against a super strong opponent like me, wasn’t this a little much?”

“I was fighting for Sunazara-san, so this was actually rather reserved,” Stephanie replied while coughing up blood.

Kinuhata decided that Stephanie was a truly strong woman.

“I’m sure you got that light machine shotgun on your own, but how did you super manage to send that Six Wings attack helicopter? Did you have someone else helping you?”

“…?”

An unnatural silence followed.

Kinuhata sensed something bad from that silence.

She then asked again.

“How did you super manage to send that Six Wings attack helicopter after us?”

“What are you talking about?” Stephanie replied staring blankly up at her. “If I could have prepared an attack helicopter in this city, I would have fired on you from outside your range.”

“…”

Kinuhata froze.

Then what had that been?

A Six Wings had definitely attacked the stolen car Hamazura had been driving. Those special unmanned weapons that were in charge of Academy City’s air defense were not something used on a simple stolen car.

The woman on the phone had said she hadn’t been involved. The girl in the dress

had also said that she wished she had the authority to send out one of those things.

And now Stephanie seemed not to have been involved either.

(There's someone other than Stephanie who is super targeting us? And this person has the authority to super freely send out a Six Wings?)

At that moment, a nearby concrete wall was blown away.

Special forces all dressed in black advanced through the destroyed wall.

They were not there for Stephanie.

In fact, they seemed more intent on restraining Kinuhata.

"Hamazura!!" Kinuhata yelled as she was forced down onto the ground. "Super run away!! I doubt they're after me!! They're after you!!"

Kinuhata Saiai had a powerful ability and held a special position. But that also meant she could guess how valuable she was and what kind of person would be targeting her.

The Six Wings incident had not fit with that.

As such, it was natural to think that the Six Wings had been targeting the more unknown value that was Hamazura Shiage.

"…!!"

Hamazura yelled something from the other side of the flames.

However, Takitsubo pulled on his arm urging him to flee. He seemed unsure of what to do for a bit, but he apparently decide to go with Takitsubo. Kinuhata felt that was the correct decision. Kinuhata Saiai was useful and valuable to Academy City. It was unlikely they would just get rid of her when they could still use her and she intended to work towards that end.

After Hamazura and Takitsubo had left, she heard footsteps coming from the entrance to the underground mall. She looked in that direction while still being

restrained. She saw the girl in the dress. The girl used a power known as Measure Heart and she was a member of the new team that had been created from the remnants of Item, School, and the like.

The two were officially allies, but they glared at each other.

“Super what are you doing?”

“The order baffled me as well. I don’t know why I have to work with the remnants of the Hound Dog unit. I was hoping you could explain it.”

The girl in the dress then said something odd.

“Did you know that Aleister has created and is carrying out some sort of plan?”

Kinuhata frowned.

The girl in the dress paid her expression no heed.

“It seems the irregular factors known as Kamijou Touma and Accelerator are within the allowable limit of irregularity. That is why they are at the core of the plan. When they struggle, it can be used to the benefit of the plan. I don’t actually know what the plan is, though. Incidentally, Hamazura Shiage is different.”

There was a brief silence before the girl in the dress began speaking again.

“That Level 0 was a factor that was supposed to have been killed in the conflict between Group, School, Item, Member, and Block. And yet he somehow managed to defeat the #4 Level 5, Mugino Shizuri, on his own and is still living today. …It seems not even Aleister could calculate everything out perfectly.”

Kinuhata desperately thought as she listened to the girl’s words and was held down by the men.

Was what she was saying really true?

“Hamazura Shiage is a Level 0 with no power or usefulness and yet he is attempting to gain something on his own. He is attempting to gain new value that even Aleister did not know of.”

The girl in the dress then stared down at Kinuhata as if trying to provoke her.

Or perhaps she was trying to drag an answer out of her.

“Depending on the situation, he could cause even more damage to Aleister’s plan than Kamijou Touma or Accelerator. Therefore, it seems Academy City is going all out in an attempt to kill him. What do you think? Does he really have that much value?”

He had no idea what was going on.

He just continued running.

Hamazura Shiage and Takitsubo Rikou ran through the nighttime city while holding hands. They had exited the underground mall, cut through the crowds, and then jumped on top of a container on a freight train that was running along past the time for the last passenger train. They breathed heavily as they sat on top of the train as it shot past stations and through tunnels at high speed. No matter how deeply they breathed, their lost stamina did not seem to recover.

Even with all that, their pursuers continued after them.

It didn’t look like a proper group.

Dark shadows ran alongside the train that was moving at high speed. He wasn’t quite sure when they managed to get aboard the train, but a number of those shadows were slowly approaching on top of the train. That wasn’t a level one could reach just with special training. They were like something out of an urban legend. Hamazura seriously doubted he could win against a group that looked like they could just punch out the Kuchisake-Onna.

What it reminded him of was…

(…Hard Taping. Their entire bodies are wrapped in the cloth-form springs that expand and contract in response to electrical signals. That’s what Leader Komaba used!)

But the goddess of fate smiled on Hamazura and Takitsubo.

Just before the figures reached them, the freight train decelerated. They must have been approaching the destination station. Hamazura held Takitsubo's small form and jumped off before the train had come to a complete stop. He was about to fall over and bloody himself on the gravel, but he just barely managed to maintain his balance.

He had no idea what district he was in.

A door on the wall of the tunnel was sitting open and he ran through the narrow corridor beyond. He didn't know where he had to run to or how long he needed to keep running. Without knowing what was going on, he couldn't come up with a detailed plan. He just decided to run with everything he had. He started running an eternal marathon with an unknown course.

But Hamazura had support.

He had Takitsubo next to him.

He had been chased by the #4 Level 5, Mugino Shizuri, before. At that time, he had been forced to fight all on his own in a hopeless situation. But now he was not alone. He had a reliable comrade at his side. So he was not as scared as before. He was able to think far enough ahead to know that they had to get out of their situation so they could rescue Kinuhata.

But then his support suddenly looked like it would break.

"?"

A tug came to Hamazura's arm. Or so he thought. When he turned around, he saw the girl in the pink track suit collapsed on the passageway's floor while still holding his hand.

"Hey, Takitsubo?"

He hurriedly tried to pick her up in his arms, but she seemed oddly heavy. It was not the weight of a human with strength in their body. It felt more like trying to pick up a large bag filled with mud and the feeling caused his hair to stand on end.

"Hamazura…"

“What’s wrong, Takitsubo!? What happened!?” he yelled, but he had an idea deep down what it was.

Takitsubo Rikou had only just left the hospital. She hadn’t been doing well when she had called him from the District 3 private salon building either. And she had lost consciousness when he had found her again in the private salon.

It had come back.

Takitsubo simply could not run all out for long periods of time as she was. She could not continue to flee from those who were after her life.

But the enemy would not wait.

Even now the unknown pursuers would be closing in on them.

“Can you stand, Takitsubo?”

She was sweating profusely and Hamazura asked his question only after suppressing his panic as much as he could. Even so, she looked him in the eye and spoke.

“Run, Hamazura.”

Hamazura’s heart had been near its limit and those words did further damage.

“We’ll both be captured like this. So you run away on your own, Hamazura.”

“No fucking way,” Hamazura muttered under his breath.

He grabbed Takitsubo’s limp arm, wrapped it around his shoulder, and lifted her slender body up almost onto his shoulder.

“Hamazura.”

“Quiet,” he said cutting off whatever she had been trying to say.

Despite her slender frame, she still felt as heavy as the metal balls put on prisoners’ legs long ago.

(So what?)

He stared only forward.

He gritted his teeth and headed forward half dragging his body along. He would not abandon Takitsubo. He couldn't just leave her there. They had to save Kinuhata Saiai too, so they couldn't just live a life on the run. He would turn things around. He would break free of that life. Thinking only that, Hamazura continued to move forward.

But he didn't last long.

His body hadn't been eaten into by Body Crystal like Takitsubo's, but his strength was not infinite. He had been involved in more than one fight that day and he had run who knows how many kilometers. His stamina wasn't going to hold up. His muscles screamed. His legs trembled and he knew he would collapse to the floor at any second. At the same time, he heard numerous footsteps coming up from behind him. He could also hear the clanking of the metal parts of submachine guns.

At that rate, they would be captured.

They would be captured and killed.

As he tried to continue on, strength left his knees. The two of them fell to the ground as if they were embracing each other. Hamazura stood back up and attempted to pick Takitsubo back up, but he couldn't do it. Her body looked like a heavy barbell to him.

"Hamazura," Takitsubo said. "It's okay, Hamazura. I'll buy you some time."

"No, you won't!!" he yelled back.

But his body didn't last.

Hamazura leaned over Takitsubo thinking he could at least shield her from bullets. He knew a bullet could pass straight through him, but he did it anyway.

(…Someone.)

Tears welled up in his eyes.

(Please, someone do what I can’t. I need a hero to gallantly appear and save her…)

He knew it wouldn’t happen. If someone like that actually existed, Hamazura Shiage would not have been in that situation in the first place.

But he couldn’t help but pray.

He didn’t want to lose Takitsubo Rikou.

The footsteps drew closer and the number grew. He couldn’t do anything. He could tell a great number of gun barrels were aimed towards them. He only had a small handgun. In the current situation, they would be turned to Swiss cheese if he tried to pull it out.

It was a completely hopeless situation.

No miracle would occur.

And then countless beams of light shot by.

They blew the unknown pursuers away and removed the threat approaching the two of them.

He had no idea what had just happened.

He just thought it must have been some kind of esper power. The dozen or so pursuers who had been approaching had been torn to pieces. Their guts had been spread about and fresh blood dyed that area of the passageway red. He didn’t know who had done it, but someone had actually saved them. Hamazura simply sat there blankly while still embracing Takitsubo Rikou.

“Heh heh heh…” As the situation slowly crept into Hamazura’s head, a sense of relief finally filled his brain. “We made it. I don’t know who helped us, but we managed to survive!!”

And then…

“…Haaamazuraaa….”

With that one word, an intense chill ran across Hamazura’s entire body.

He recognized that way of calling his name. And once he recalled that, the power that had just flown by clicked into place as well. It was Meltdowner. It was a type of power that manipulated electrons. It didn’t manipulate the waves or the particles. It manipulated and fired the electrons themselves. That power was recorded as belonging to the #4 Level 5. Its user had…had…had once been defeated by Hamazura Shiage.

The user was approaching.

This was not a hero that had come to save Hamazura.

Characteristic footsteps approached as if to proudly proclaim the Meltdowner user's existence. The person approached in a straight line stepping on the fresh blood and guts of the recently killed people.

Hamazura recognized the girl.

She had no right eye.

Her left arm had been ripped off.

A pale blue light like one would see during welding resided deep within the empty red eye socket. The same was true for the left arm. As if to compensate for the missing arm, a dazzling arm of light was jutting out. It must have been made of fairly high energy because it continuously made the sound of a high voltage current frying a bug in a bug zapper.

It was created from her power.

It was created by the #4 Level 5 power, Meltdowner.

That was not some cheap power that would manifest in just anyone. As far as Hamazura knew, she was the only person with that power.

A cracking voice leaked from Hamazura Shiage's mouth.

He squeezed out a name despite his vocal cords and entire body trembling.

"Mugino…Shizuri…!?"

"Don't let pitiful bastards like that take your life. The one who's going to rip you to pieces is me!!"

This time, the true mouth of despair swallowed Hamazura and Takitsubo whole.

Part 13

Accelerator, Tsuchimikado Motoharu, Musujime Awaki, and Unabara Mitsuki; the four of them currently were at the deepest place of the tunnel-shaped shelter. In front of them was the defeated Shiokishi. His powered suit had been taken apart, and an obsidian dagger was stabbed into his stomach.

“To protect the people close to us, we have two choices.”

Accelerator cracked his neck while holding onto his crutch.

“One, we make you spit out everything you know about Dragon; Two, we wobble the knife that’s in your stomach right now and spill your innards onto the ground.”

“Dragon, huh…”

Shiokishi muttered in a low voice, as if he had forgotten his abdomen had been stabbed.

“I’ve already guessed your goals behind all this.”

“Don’t tell us you’re going to say something like ‘actually I don’t know either’.”

“If that was the case then I’d be relieved. Unfortunately I actually do know about it. Because I’m in a position that needs to know about it. That’s why I’m troubled.”

The four of them went quiet.

Only Shiokishi continued.

“That’s something that can’t be allowed to see the light. If you must make me tell you about the details I will comply, but for your sakes I’ll say this now: It is better to not know. This is not a threat. This is merely advice from someone who knows. Truth be told, I didn’t want to know about it. Even now from the bottom of my heart I think how great it would be if I never knew.”

“What is Dragon?”

Accelerator questioned him.

Even after being given that kind of advice, they had to move forward.

According to Tsuchimikado and Unabara, Dragon was a code meaning 'angel'. On September 30th, Accelerator had witnessed something like wings of light. Kihara Amata’s movements, Last Order, the Virus, and everything that had happened recently seemed to be related to the wings of light.

“… What are you talking about.”

Faced with the questioning, Shiokishi actually laughed.

He was using the tone of ‘seeing someone completely misunderstood and can’t help but laugh’.

“Dragon is everywhere. Look, it is there right behind you at this moment.”

He thought it was just a ridiculous joke.

But right after that, a few dull ‘thud’ sounds reached his ears.

“Tsuchimikado?”

Accelerator subconsciously turned around.

He called their names.

“Musujime? Unabara?”

They had all collapsed onto the ground. They all had completely lost consciousness. Though there were no visible wounds, there were also no signs they would be getting back up. The Group that Accelerator belonged to was an organization that prided itself on having above-normal battle capabilities. Now, this organization had been taken down easily by an unknown attack. There was no opportunity to even fight back.

After that,

Accelerator saw it.

“You’re not Fuse Kazakiri!”

Into the ears of the wide-eyed Accelerator who stood there in shock, came the voice of Shiokishi.

“That, is nothing more than a simple production line used to give Dragon shape.”

After saying what needed to be said, Shiokishi lost consciousness due to blood loss. Though he fell with a groan, Accelerator didn’t have the latitude to turn around and look.

His eyes were fixed forward.

Golden long hair.

A shining, tall and thin stature. And loose white clothing that covered the body entirely. Though its gender could not be definitely ascertained, at least the outward appearance looked female.

On its face was an expression that was full of happiness, sadness, grief and anger, but deep down it had emotions completely different from that of humans; it was an expression that was extremely calm.

“—Dragon, huh?”

That thing opened its mouth.

Though that thing was in a humanoid shape, Accelerator felt there was nothing more wrong than that thing being capable of human speech.

“That name is not exactly wrong, to a point. Rather, calling me an ‘angel’ is alright too… At least, it’s closer to the truth compared to the rumored ‘extraterrestrial life form’, ‘holy guardian angel’, ‘the true person who holds the secrets to modern Western magic organizations’ and wild ideas like those. Though, my existence, is something completely different from the angels recorded in the Bible. So, to more accurately describe my presence, the aforementioned word should be used.”

That thing declared.

“There are very few people that persevere and reach this point in their search. Because of that, there is value and worth in my declaration of my name. So, I will answer your question.”

The true identity of the thing that Accelerator and others had chased after for so long.

“I’m the one that once taught the necessary parts of the necessary knowledge to an eccentric magician named Crowley—*Aiwass*.”

Notes

1. ↑ While this isn't a direct translation, this is probably the scientific phenomena being described: active noise cancelling

Chapter 4: Two Monsters Inviting You to Hell. *Dragon(≠Angel).*

Part 1

Aiwass.

That was the name the being that seemed to be classified under the codename Dragon gave itself.

Facing Aiwass, Accelerator carefully observed the blonde being.

His thoughts did not lead him to an action he should take next.

Accelerator and the rest of Group had been acting on the basis of finding the identity of the top secret Dragon and using that information to negotiate on an even playing field with the higher ups of the city. However, they had been thinking of using the mere information. They had never thought Dragon itself would appear before them so easily.

It was possible Accelerator had believed somewhere in his heart that he would never find the identity of Dragon. That was why his thoughts ground to a halt when the being appeared before him so suddenly.

“You look surprised,” said the blonde being known as Aiwass without changing its expression.

Its golden hair seemed to be putting off a faint light.

“Is my appearance that baffling to you?”

Of course it was.

Why had the being that Academy City had been hiding at all costs appeared to him? Accelerator thought of a few possibilities and he chose the most logical one among them.

“…Do you work for Shiokishi? If you’re backup, you’re a little too late.”

“Do you really think that?”

Aiwass shook its head.

Despite having made a clear declaration of its intentions, Accelerator couldn’t grasp what the being was thinking.

“…”

Accelerator remained silent for a bit and then rejected the possibility he himself had spoken. It had seemed like Shiokishi had hated…no, feared Dragon. Even if that wasn’t it, it still hadn’t been the reaction one would have to one’s pawn.

But even so, why had Aiwass appeared before Accelerator at that time?

“I have recognized that you have a certain level of value and…I was curious,” said Aiwass.

The words were spoken with such a carefree sense that it seemed to deny everything Group, Shiokishi, and the others had done.

“I wanted you to meet me, so I appeared. Are you dissatisfied?”

Something wasn’t right.

But it didn’t seem the being was hiding anything.

It was like the being was saying that Accelerator had not been silently defeated along with Tsuchimikado and the others solely because the being had seen value and found interest in him.

(What do I do…?)

Accelerator slightly lowered his center of gravity.

Many beings had appeared threatening Accelerator's life such as Kihara Amata of the Hound Dogs and Kakine Teitoku of School, but Aiwass was completely different. He didn't even feel any ill will coming from the being.

Aiwass was an extremely important element to the higher ups of Academy City.

However, there was more than one way of using that fact. Defeating Aiwass would certainly bring major damage to the plan they were putting together, but there may have been a much more effective way of dealing with the situation.

It didn't help that Accelerator didn't know what kind of role Aiwass played.

He couldn't come up with an effective way of using the being if he didn't at least know that much.

Accelerator's mental state was much like that of a chained up dog and Aiwass showed its first feeling towards him in a surprised looking face.

"This is a different result than I had predicted. I was sure the defeat of your companions would cause you to retaliate and be thrown to the ground before me within 3 seconds."

"…Now that statement would be a perfect trigger," responded Accelerator in a low voice.

Aiwass had indeed silently defeated Tsuchimikado Motoharu, Musujime Awaki, and Unabara Mitsuki.

However, that was not an impetus for Accelerator to take hostile action. As he had said many times, Accelerator saw Group as a nothing more than something to be used.

He would first try to drag out whatever information he could.

After that was when he would determine if he needed to take hostile action.

Having chosen what he would do, Accelerator looked back at Aiwass.

“What are you? Why are you hidden behind the codename Dragon?”

“Do I have to explain it from there?” the blonde being said in a tone that seemed to be saying it was surprised at how unintelligent Accelerator was. “My identity is nothing much. I am just a mere hboieEXISTENCEab, so-…”

Aiwass’s words blurred.

Accelerator frowned, but Aiwass itself seemed puzzled and brought its hand up to its throat to check on its voice.

“…Hmm. So I cannot even express that level of meaning in this world. There are not enough headers. This will make the explanation difficult. You do not mind if I do so in a rather roundabout way, do you?. It would be simple enough to express this directly, but then that wgbudDESTRUCTIONwsrui will occur.”

Aiwass did not seem to be joking.

The way its voice sounded was odd. When the being’s voice blurred like that, the source of the sound seemed to shift. That made it sound very odd. It was a bit like wearing stereo headphones with the right and left switched.

“Are you familiar with the term Fuse Kazakiri?”

“…?”

Shiokishi had mentioned that name, but Accelerator had no idea to what it referred. However, when Aiwass saw his face, it sighed.

“It really is a pain to have to explain everything from the very beginning. Remember what I say and look into it on your own later. At any rate, that is a being that can be referred to as an artificial angel. Given her properties, that is not incorrect, but that does not actually reach what Fuse Kazakiri truly is. She is actually something like a production line used to form me, Aiwass.”

Accelerator had not understood most of what the being said, but the word angel stuck with him.

When Kihara Amata had injected Last Order with that virus, wings of light had appeared. Apparently, the true purpose of that had been part of a plan prepared

for this Aiwass.

“Let us compare it to a crystal. And a familiar substance would be…water or salt. Yes, let us go with salt. Think of an AIM diffusion field as extremely concentrated salt water. However, that alone will not cause crystallization. To effectively proceed, it is better to add a foreign material to the salt water. That foreign material could be a single stick or it could be something like small dust. It could even be an nsrioANGELgau like Fuse Kazakiri. …Well, the crystallization is simple, but when you want it to be a particular shape and size, the qualities of the core must be carefully prepared.”

“…Are you saying you’re a being made based on this Fuse Kazakiri thing?”

“Technically, it is more accurate to say Fuse Kazakiri is a factory production line fine-tuned in order to create me. I will not deny that I was born following the pattern of Fuse Kazakiri. Although, born is not quite the right word. It would be more correct to say uyAPPEARidvif…damn, the language cannot keep up. Rather than ‘born’, let us say ‘appeared’. That is not technically correct, but I cannot express it any better than that.”

Aiwass moved its own index finger slowly down along its chest to its abdomen.

“Aleister seems to like roundabout methods, but I am not something that can be dealt with using clone technology.”

If that being was a mass of AIM diffusion fields, then it was not human.

Despite the discussion being so absurd, Accelerator did not laugh.

In fact, he would have found it incredibly odd if Aiwass were to claim to be human.

“What to do?” said Aiwass. “I appeared out of curiosity, but what do I do now? What do you want to do? Will you try to crush Aleister’s ambitions based on the information you receive from me?”

“…Are you serious?” Accelerator’s caution rose upon hearing those last words. “I don’t know what that board chairman is after, but you’re at the core of it. Crushing Aleister’s plan would be to return a being supported by artificially means such as yourself to nothingness.”

“True,” Aiwass nodded causing its blonde hair to sway. “What is your point?”

“What…?”

“Let us speak of history,” Aiwass said suddenly changing the topic. “The humans that live on the surface of this planet do quite a bit in the name of preserving their environment. They say that most of the plants and animals will go extinct if things do not change, so they diligently gather up empty cans and lower the amount of smoke they produce.”

“Well, some people are rather zealous about that kind of thing.”

“Are you humans taking these actions solely to get people to watch you?”

“What the hell is your point?”

“I am merely saying that history does not change in the slightest,” Aiwass responded smoothly. “This planet once had an ice age. The environment changed drastically and most plants and animals went extinct. …But did history itself come to an end? Whether the tiny beings clinging to the surface live or die, the flow of time continues on unchanged. Even if a worldwide nuclear war began right here and now and every life form on the surface of the earth were completely annihilated, it would have no effect on the thick pillar of history. In ten thousand years or in one hundred thousand years, something else would come forth in the place of the current life forms.”

“…”

“This is the same. I may not be a being that should be a part of this dimension’s history. It seems the man known as Aleister is persistent in his desire to use me, but it is no problem to me if his plan suffers a major setback. It may take ten thousand years or one hundred thousand years, but I will have another opportunity to asbuAPPEARoagbv…I mean, appear. Even that is of little value to me.”

Aiwass slowly spread its arms wide causing its long blonde hair to sway.

“Now then, what will you do? It could be amusing if you killed me here and gave quite a shock to Aleister. Of course, that is only if you possess the ability to do so.”

Accelerator couldn’t read the being.

Some kind of gear must have been missing because it felt like none of the usual offensive thought patterns appeared. That was what it felt like. It was not an issue of finding a basis. Accelerator did not think he would be able to find an opening if he just took a long time to calculate everything out. There was simply no point in fighting. The idea felt as foolish as running along the ground attempting to catch up to the sun sinking below the horizon.

As Accelerator made no movement, Aiwass spoke with its arms still spread wide.

“Oh? Is that really your choice? Let me tell you this first: Aleister may believe in his ability to a fault, but he is not a perfect human.”

“What?”

“The plan he has put together has already begun to come apart at the seams in a few places.”

Despite describing a problem that its very existence depended on, Aiwass did not seem to especially care.

“With every irregular phenomenon Aleister himself brings about, he believes that he is recovering from it in a way that benefits his plan, but tiny cracks have started to spread bit by bit. At this rate, situations will develop from the plan he created that Aleister himself does not foresee. For instance…”

Accelerator had a very bad feeling about what was to come.

He had a feeling he was about to hear something he shouldn’t.

But Aiwass continued.

It continued as if toying with the minds of tiny and miserable people was its sole enjoyment in a boring world.

“For instance, Last Order, who is one of the cornerstones of the plan, will surely eventually ‘break down’ at the current rate. Although, she is just a clone, so that problem can be solved simply by creating another clone with the same

functionality.”

Those words were enough.

Accelerator abandoned all cause for concern and determined to take action.

Part 2

(Where am I?)

Hamazura Shiage was focusing on nothing but running down a dark, dark passageway.

(Where the hell am I!?)

He was alone. Up until then he had not left Takitsubo for even an instant, but she was gone now. The reason for that was simple. The two of them had been forcibly torn apart. The figure slowly approaching from behind him as if she were tormenting him simply possessed that much power. It wasn’t an issue of her physical strength or her special power. It was based in an overwhelming fear.

“…Haaamazuraaa.”

“!?”

The voice was coming from the other side of the darkness.

Hamazura jumped to the side with everything he had not even bothering to turn around. He struck a metal handrail and flipped over it. By the time he realized the passageway was running through the air like a bridge, his body had already started to fall.

But that was still preferable to the alternative.

Immediately afterwards, a dreadful beam of light surged forth. It melted and blew away the metal passageway Hamazura had just been on creating an orange waterfall.

Meltdowner.

The #4 Level 5.

“Gah!!”

Just after those terms floated up from the back of Hamazura’s mind, his back struck the ground. He must have fallen about 3 meters. He was on yet another midair passageway. Below the metal mesh that made up the floor, was yet another manmade floor.

It was a rather large area.

It was more than 100 meters wide and its length had to have been in the kilometers. And further down below Hamazura’s feet a number of small fighter craft were lined up. A quick glance told him that there were more than 20 of them.

(So is this District 23, the district that specializes in aviation?)

The place did not look like a normal servicing area to him. It was probably a test area for new models. The freight train Hamazura and Takitsubo had hitched a ride on may have been supplying the area with materials.

Hamazura then heard footsteps.

They came from directly above him. That meant they were most likely coming from a passageway connected to the one Hamazura had just fallen from. He quickly hid himself by jumping behind a box-shaped object that seemed to be a crane cockpit.

“As usual, you’re quick only when it comes to running. But can you really afford to do that? You’ve left your precious Takitsubo-chan behind!”

“…!!!!!!”

Hamazura gritted his teeth.

As he was behind cover, he couldn’t see, but he could tell. Mugino Shizuri was likely dragging along Takitsubo’s limp form with one arm. The reason she hadn’t killed her was simple: she wanted to torment Hamazura as much as possible.

He truly wanted to jump out right then and there.

However, that was not a monster he could defeat in a frontal attack. He would merely be turned to ash in an instant. That would mean there would be no one left to save Takitsubo. Once the “tormenting Hamazura” reason was gone, Mugino would just kill Takitsubo.

(…Fuck. Fuck! Fuck!! Why? Why!? Why did she have to appear now of all times!?)

He pulled out his handgun with a trembling hand and pulled out the magazine to check how many bullets he had left. As he did, Mugino’s voice resounded throughout the fighter testing area like the voice of a mocking demon.

“Are you this panicked because you can’t understand how I was revived? Cyborg, cloning, or nanodevices☆!? If you get it right, I’ll give you a bonus, but I doubt you can figure it out. You do have the face of an idiot after all.”

She continued to shoot beams of light down.

She was clearly not aiming for Hamazura, but the vibrations caused still wrapped his entire body in fear.

“Well, it seems they used a ‘dark legacy’ left behind by an eccentric doctor known as Heaven Canceller. By using an oil-based melted framework to adjust the regeneration pace of the flesh, it brings about high-speed cell division. I doubt that doctor himself knows it is being used for this, though. But none of that really matters. Right now I just want to enjoy watching you cry.”

Hamazura stuck his face around the edge of the box just a bit to check on the situation.

“Haaamazuraaa. You can play hide and seek if you like, but you might want to show yourself soon. If you don’t, I may decide to go after your cute Takitsubo-chan first.”

“Aghh!!” came a groan.

Mugino had grabbed Takitsubo’s hair and held her up as if to use her as a shield.

Mugino brought her other arm, the large arm of light created by a loop of Meltdowner, to a position that was almost touching Takitsubo’s skin.

“Gya ha ha!! Oh, now where to start burning her? Maybe I should roast that little face of hers. Or maybe I should press against her pink ***** and burn it pitch black!! Hey, what do you think, Hamazura? You’d better come out, cause I’m gonna burn her into a black mummy! Or can you still get off to fucking a hole like that!?”

(Dammit…)

“I’ll count to three. If you don’t come out, I’ll burn Takitsubo’s ***** as punishment. Of course, if you’d rather just abandon her, then you can just sit there masturbating to the stench of her virginity being burned away.”

Mugino did not give a nice slow count as was usual.

Instead…

“Three-two-one-go!!”

“Fuck!!”

Due to Mugino’s ridiculously fast count, Hamazura had to jump out from behind the crane cockpit box. He immediately aimed his handgun at Mugino, but she was much faster. And on top of that, Mugino had Takitsubo as a shield.

“Good boy, Hamazura.”

An explosive noise cut off all other noise.

She had merely made a motion similar to flicking a small piece of filth with her

finger, but it produced a strike that was even more dreadful than a shell from a battleship. It flew by right next to Hamazura and struck a drum. The fuel within the drum ignited and the blast sent him 5 meters through the air.

If she had wanted to, she surely would have been able to kill him instantly.

The only reason she hadn't was because she wanted to torment him more before killing him.

(…Shit…)

Rolling over so he was face up was all he could do. As he did he was reminded again that his title of "the Level 0 that once defeated Mugino Shizuri" was a bunch of crap. He had been saved due to a clear coincidence or a miracle back then. She was not a low level monster that he could defeat again and again. The factor that was Hamazura Shiage was not a trump card against her. He could not win.

"Hamazuraaa, Hamazuraaaa!!"

He heard her calling his name.

He attempted to stand up, but she made her next move before he could.

However, she did not provide the finishing blow against him while he could barely move. From the beginning, she had been trying to extend the time he would spend in hell as she thoroughly tormented him.

Mugino Shizuri turned her aim towards Takitsubo Rikou.

"What? Are you trying to turn yourself into some kind of tragic heroine? You aren't just some princess. You have the power to fight."

"!?"

An odd noise as if from a spasm came from Takitsubo's throat.

Mugino casually tossed Takitsubo's limp body aside and stuck her remaining flesh-and-blood hand into her pocket. She pulled out an object about the size of a case of mechanical pencil lead.

It was a Body Crystal case.

“If you use AIM Stalker at its fullest, you may be able to reverse the flow from my AIM diffusion field and take over my power, isn’t that right?”

She tossed the Body Crystal case over with her fingertips. The small case clattered across the ground and stopped right next to Takitsubo. That was the final piece Takitsubo needed to turn the situation around. However, she would certainly “break down” if she were to use it. Her body was already so limp due to the side effects of Body Crystal. She had no more leeway. If she used Body Crystal even once more, it would all be over.

But…

“If you want to run away, you can just do so.”

Mugino Shizuri’s words were a major shock to Takitsubo’s weak heart.

No, they weren’t just a shock. They were so forceful they almost broke her heart.

“But then Hamazura would be burned to a crisp because you abandoned him. Gya ha ha ha!! I really don’t care what you choose! Either way, I get to see something most enjoyable!!”

“Uuh…”

Takitsubo Rikou stretched out her arm.

She stretched out her arm knowing full well that she was bringing destruction to her body.

She had a single reason.

She was doing it to save Hamazura Shiage who had been knocked down and would likely soon be killed.

“Uuuuuuuuuuuuuhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!”

With what sounded like a moan from a beast, Takitsubo grabbed the Body Crystal case. As if she were stabbing herself in the chest with a knife, she

opened the lid all at once to make sure she did not hesitate partway through. Seeing that, Mugino laughed uproariously. She couldn't help but enjoy seeing the desire to save someone precious bringing on the worst possible conclusion.

(…Hamazura…)

Takitsubo clenched her eyes shut and opened her mouth.

She moved her trembling hands and started to throw the contents of the case inside her mouth.

But then…

"Muginooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!!" Hamazura Shiage screamed.

Immediately afterwards, the sound of a large motor running reverberated throughout the area. Mugino realized it was the sound of one of the crane arms that were used to service the fighters, so she moved back a bit. A swinging wire and the hook on the end of the arm used for hanging heavy things on swung down like a morning star. Mugino had evaded it, but it struck Takitsubo's side just as she was about to use the Body Crystal.

An unpleasant cracking noise rang out.

The Body Crystal case was knocked far away and Takitsubo's body went over the handrail and disappeared down onto the lower level.

"Ha ha ha," Mugino laughed.

That hadn't been the result she had expected, but occasionally coincidences brought even more enjoyment.

"Gya ha ha ha ha ha!! What the hell was that, Hamazura!? Who are you trying to protect here!? What are you doing finishing her off on your own!?"

But then Mugino felt a chill even as she was laughing.

Hamazura did not react when struck by her scorn. He showed no sign of disgrace or regret. And then Mugino realized what had happened too late. Hamazura had been aiming for Takitsubo from the beginning. He had prevented her from using

the Body Crystal and had gotten her away from Mugino. Even if he had injured the person he was supposed to be protecting, he had done it to prevent her from receiving a decidedly fatal blow.

Mugino thought back.

The object being held by the crane's hook had been a powered suit worn by workers who were dealing with dangerous objects like bombs for the planes. He had been handing it to the delicate Takitsubo to lower the odds of her dying even if by only a little bit.

"…Mugino Shizuri…"

Why had he gone that far?

The answer was clear.

"It looks like killing you once wasn't enough."

The Level 0 who had once destroyed the #4 Level 5 truly stood up once more.

And just as before, he did it to protect the girl known as Takitsubo Rikou.

Part 3

Accelerator hit the switch on his choker-style electrode.

Now the #1 Level 5 could use his vector transformation ability at any time. He could reflect every sort of power and create tremendous amounts of destructive force from that little power. With that, there was no enemy he could not defeat.

Aiwass's face had been expressionless with a slight bit of ridicule mixed in.

The being had said that Last Order would “break down” in the near future if Aleister’s plan continued as it was.

And the being had implicitly said something else: Try and kill me if you can. With your level of power, you cannot even temporarily cause my existence to disappear.

(…Fine then.)

Accelerator controlled the vectors for the strength of his legs and shot forward explosively.

(Whether you’re a collection of AIM diffusion fields or an angel or whatever, I won’t hold back if you’re going to harm that kid. I’ll take you up on your offer and have you disappear!!)

Aiwass did not even attempt to evade. It stared at Accelerator with its arms still spread out. Accelerator charged in and stuck out a hand with its fingers spread out. He just had to alter the vectors to destroy Aiwass from the inside.

But an unexplained shock struck Accelerator on his upper body in a diagonal line.

It was a decisive strike with something like a heavy blade. Immediately after Accelerator was aware of that, he hit the floor and rolled a few times backwards. An unbelievable amount of blood gushed out. It wasn’t just coming from the wound on his upper body. Blood was flowing from his mouth and nose as well. It may sound like a joke, but it seriously seemed like a mystery that his organs didn’t come spilling out of that large wound.

“Gh…bhaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhh!?”

He didn’t know what had happened. People like Kihara Amata and Kakine Teitoku had pierced his wall of reflection in the past, but Aiwass was different. That strike had not been based on some theory that allowed it to slip past the reflection. Even after receiving that decisive blow, he was still unable to analyze what had happened to his own body.

“Oh, whoops. That was my mistake,” said Aiwass sounding completely calm.

Something grew from its back pushing its long blonde hair aside. They were wings. The wings were emitting a too brilliant brilliance that gave the feeling that it was worse for the human body than a nuclear explosion. That must have been what had sliced Accelerator.

The wings were very odd.

They were not simply gold colored. They were a palely glowing platinum that had a white core. …That wasn't quite accurate, but it was how Accelerator expressed it in his brain. The wings gave him a very strong out-of-place feeling because he could not comprehend what he was seeing.

"Dammit, Aleister. You added something into the snCONSTRUCTIONbozl virus. So you embedded an auto defense bseouABILITYgbu into my beuoAPPEARENCEdnm via Last Order. Sorry about that. It seems a suicide prevention device has been nbspgADDEDnpisr in. These nspidhWINGSgprws move on their own, so you'll have to do something about them if you want to sbgpKILLnapedv me."

Aiwass's words became more and more distorted.

However, Accelerator was not really listening. His eyes changed to a red even more sinister than the blood spewing from his body. As he lay on the ground, his outstretched hand shattered the floorboards.

"abeoughabaeougbaoKILLwobnoweuferya…!!"

Accelerator's back split open and jet black wings burst forth. Those wings of darkness stood in stark contrast to Aiwass's pale platinum-like wings. That demon whose upper body was dyed red with blood and whose lips and teeth had even been turned crimson slowly rose up smoothly as if ignoring gravity altogether.

"Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law, hm?"

However, Aiwass shook its head while looking at those black wings.

Accelerator had no way of knowing, but what Aiwass had just said referred to the central pillar of a certain magician and had been recorded in the Book of the Law.

“Unfortunately, that is from the wrong rggrAEONipiregj. Your rsgPOWERnophe is from Osiris’s time. With that, you cannot truly hosefOPPOSEqierd one from Horus such as myself.”

A tremendous roar rang out.

It was a shockwave created by the clash between black and pale platinum wings.

The shockwave became a storm.

An explosive wind was created with Accelerator and Aiwass at the center. However, the fight was not even. In the first strike, Accelerator’s black wings were torn off at the base and the second strike completely sliced them to pieces. A sound that was more of a roar than it was a yell reverberated throughout the area. Aiwass swung its pale platinum wings again. Red blood flew into the air and was blown away by the explosive wind.

There was simply too great a gap between them.

Accelerator’s black wings were quite destructive, but it was a bit like he was simply swinging around a heavy wooden club. On the other hand, Aiwass’s wings were more like a sharp and famous sword that was being wielded with incredible skill.

The sound of something falling to the ground could be heard.

No, it was the sound of some*one* collapsing.

“So this is all?” Aiwass said looking down at Accelerator who was lying in the middle of a pool of blood.

A normal person would certainly have died, but Accelerator was still breathing. He was subconsciously using his vector transformation ability to circulate his blood between the broken blood vessels. Due to this, streams of red liquid were flowing around him like a drink spilled in outer space.

But that was it.

He was just barely managing to hold onto his life. He could do nothing more to revive himself.

“I tried to bring you to attack me by bringing up Last Order, but I was able to do so much easier than I had expected. With this level of maturity, you cannot even deal with Fuse Kazakiri. Dammit Aleister, are you rushing things *this time, too*? …The matter of Kakine Teitoku bothers me as well.”

Having said that, Aiwass turned its back on Accelerator. The being used its legs to walk from the area. That mundane method seemed much odder than if it had suddenly disappeared or flown away.

And then what felt to Aiwass like a tiny crack appeared in the center of its body.

An error had occurred in the aggregation of AIM diffusion fields that controlled Aiwass’s existence. Thinking about what could have caused it, Aiwass turned around. Aiwass began to disintegrate starting with the ends of its golden hair, but its expression did not change.

“You said…” came a cracking voice.

It was Accelerator’s voice, but it was no longer in the indecipherable language that Aiwass had also been using. He was now speaking in proper human words.

“…You said that…you appeared by using…the AIM diffusion fields… throughout Academy City… And that kid was…given a virus to create… something called Fuse…Kazakiri…in order to control…your appearance…”

“So you have thought about it.”

Aiwass smiled. As it did, its fingertips started to lose form.

Its eyes looked down at Accelerator’s cane.

“So you took the jamming device used to cut off the signal for the remote control for your choker and set it to the entire Misaka Network. That network guides the mass of all of Academy City’s AIM diffusion fields. It is true that blocking the Misaka Network from this area will locally remove the crystal’s core and return it to the original salt water.”

As the being spoke, Accelerator’s legs started trembling.

It wasn’t due to anything Aiwass had done.

“But do you understand what that means? That is the same as severing the sole lifeline that is keeping you alive.”

“…”

The sound of dripping blood continued.

Accelerator was just barely preventing himself from bleeding to death by using his power to keep the blood flowing between blood vessels. If he sealed his vector transformation ability, only one path would remain for him.

“…Shut the…fuck up…” Accelerator said with trembling lips.

The jamming was set to grow stronger with time. Before long he would be unable to talk or walk on his own. Knowing he had to end this before that happened, Accelerator gathered up all his remaining strength and pulled out his handgun.

He pulled out a human weapon instead of some unknown power of an angel or a demon.

He had walked along a blood-stained path to save the girl known as Last Order. To do so, he had determined to even make an enemy of Last Order and to become a king of pure evil.

That villain was not the type of person to bow down and beg for his life at a time like that.

That type of cowardly action was not part of the villainy Accelerator was presenting to the world.

That was why he did not hesitate in his decision.

Even if it meant he would collapse while spewing blood and have his organs spill from his wound, pulling the trigger to save Last Order was his form of evil.

“Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law,” Aiwass muttered as if it were singing.

Its arms had already disintegrated up to the elbows and the pale platinum wings

with a white core were not moving as if their gears had been removed. The being's body had turned almost transparent and something like a triangular prism could be seen hidden in the center of its head. The object's surface was continually moving around making a clicking noise like a keyboard.

Realizing that Accelerator's gun was aimed squarely at it, Aiwass spread out its half-gone arms and smiled as if to welcome the bullet.

"I see. Then show me what your Law is."

A gunshot rang out.

It was followed by a sound like a crystal being shattered and the dull sound of a human body collapsing.

Part 4

Mugino Shizuri jumped down to the lower level from the melted passageway.

The sound of her landing on the wire mesh floor of the passageway resounded throughout the fighter testing facility. Hamazura Shiage stood on the same level. He was leaning his injured body up against the outside of a crane cockpit box while staring at Mugino's one-eyed face.

"Killing me once wasn't enough?" Mugino repeated Hamazura's words in enjoyment as the arm of light created by looping a large number of electron beams crackled. "That's not enough. That's not nearly enough. If you want to deal with me, you need to use your brain cells a bit more before complaining!!"

Her arm of light explosively expanded.

But Hamazura was already moving.

If Hamazura had raised up his handgun that he was holding loosely at his side, aimed it at her, and fired, Mugino would have had enough time to blow his body apart.

So Hamazura did not do that.

He pulled the trigger with his arm still hanging down at his side. Of course, this caused the bullet to fly in a completely different direction. It accurately hit a nearby fire extinguisher.

The gas sent white powder all over the area.

(…Is he trying to hide?)

“Don’t take me lightly, Hamazuraaa!!”

Similarly to an audience responding to a cheap performance, Mugino fired beams of Meltdowner. By firing a few of the brilliant white beams in a row, the silhouette visible through the powder from the fire extinguisher was blown through in some vital areas and then blown away.

“Tch. I wanted to slowly crush him. Did I just take him out in an instant?” Mugino muttered, but that wasn’t what had happened.

What she had blown away was a pile of cardboard boxes that had been next to him. While Mugino had been distracted by that dummy, Hamazura had jumped down from the wire mesh passageway and fled to the bottommost level.

“Ha ha. Ha ha ha ha ha. Fleeing using a smokescreen and a dummy? …What are you, a ninja!?”

She fired more beams down towards the lower level out of annoyance and confusion before jumping down herself.

A number of fighter jets were lined up in the vast space. They were prototype models, but they had been fully painted and otherwise perfectly finished. They may have been scheduled to undergo an equipment load endurance test because a good number of missiles and bombs were installed below the wings.

(Now then…)

Mugino looked around with her remaining eye.

Hamazura Shiage was most likely watching her from somewhere waiting for an opportunity. Even he would know that running away any more would just get him shot in the back.

"…"

For an instant, she glanced over towards one of the fighters, but she decided that it wasn't likely he would counterattack with one of them. She would have some problems dealing with the 20-30 mm Gatling gun or the various types of missiles, but she seriously doubted that would happen.

She couldn't see a thug like Hamazura Shiage knowing how to use something as specialized as a fighter jet. And even if he could operate one, they were in a storage area. The fighters were standing still so Mugino would be able to evaporate them in a single strike.

Mugino grinned as she slowly walked along the kilometers long passageway.

(This is it. This is it! If that small fry stands up to me, I can just kill him in a single strike. He needs to play his part too, so I can slowly torment him.)

"Where arrrre you, Haaamazuraaa?" Mugino sang to an arbitrary rhythm as she swayed her arm of light back and forth.

And then…

"Here," came the unexpected response.

"!?"

The response had come from quite close nearby. Mugino had been hit by a counterattack with a handgun the previous time, so she quickly and forcefully twisted her body around and fired Meltdowner without checking on her target. A brilliant beam of light shot out and the fighter jet in its path melted orange.

But just before it did, Mugino saw what was there.

A service tractor and a long narrow bomb packed in what looked like a large pipe were in the place she had fired on. On top of those was a wireless headset that was set at its highest volume so the sound would escape into the surrounding area and a fiberscope with a wireless LAN that would be used for aircraft maintenance.

She didn’t have time to think about it.

Before she could think a single thought, the 200 kg bomb that she herself had struck with intense heat split open and created a large explosion that enveloped the other bombs, the missiles, and the airplane fuel.

Hamazura was hiding at a distance, but he did not escape unharmed.

He had found an electric tractor-like vehicle used for moving the fighters and had been silently travelling at high speed away. He had hidden behind cover about 500 meters from the explosion. His cover was a small truck filled with paint tools used to change the color of the fighters. He had used a maintenance radio to send out his voice and was subsequently sent rolling along the ground as the blast struck him.

“Gwaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!”

He felt like his eardrums were about to burst. An odd pressure came from within that felt like it was going to pop out his eyeballs. But he was more worried about where Takitsubo was. He had at least left the dummy radio in a place away from where he had dropped her and he had handed her the powered suit with the crane. Quick actions were too much for the suit’s normal mode and its high mobility mode could only be activated with a special electronic key, so the suit couldn’t be used to fight, but it should have helped her endure the explosive blast. Even so, he hoped that she had been outside the range of the explosion.

In any case, Mugino Shizuri should have been caught up in the blast.

Fortunately for Hamazura, she still looked down on all of her enemies. In this case, that wasn’t an inaccurate way of viewing her enemy, but it had created unnecessary openings in her defenses and had caused her to let her guard down a bit.

(That 200 kg bomb was created to destroy thick concrete bunkers. That isn’t something to be used on a flesh-and-blood human. I’m sure that was enough even for Mugino. I need to find Takitsubo and get the hell out of here.)

Hamazura tossed aside the radio and the small monitor for the fiberscope and ran back the way he had come.

A hot wind blew about.

The floor had collapsed in the area of the explosion and the destruction had even reached the underground space below. The connecting passageways above had been twisted and knocked down. Hamazura ran amongst it all and searched through that area where a secondary or tertiary explosion could occur at any time all the while calling Takitsubo's name.

Then he heard something moving.

“Takitsubo?”

Hamazura turned around.

But…

“Haaamazuraaa.”

Heat suddenly fled his entire body. It was already too late. That arm of light was stretching out from the black smoke. Hamazura twisted his body, but an unpleasant sound and smell came from his ear. It sounded like oil being poured onto a heated frying pan.

“Gaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!?”

Mugino appeared cutting through the fog and looking down on Hamazura as he writhed around on the ground.

“Did you reallllly think this kind of mass produced weaponry could take out the #4, Hamazuraaa?”

“Fuck! Fuck, fuck, fuck!!”

Hamazura desperately tried to suppress the intense pain eating into his ear, gripped his handgun with both hands, and fired.

But Mugino suddenly disappeared.

She had fired Meltdowner like a rocket engine. She must have escaped the 200 kg bomb the same way. With the sound of a blunt weapon being swung, Mugino moved outside of his vision.

“Do you really think that kind of obvious counterattack will work on me!?”

The tip of her shoe stabbed into Hamazura’s back as he lay on the ground knocking him a few meters through the air. He couldn’t even cry out anymore. He had stopped breathing and he fell back to the floor…no, he fell through the crack in the floor opened up by the explosion.

A number of shocks ran through his body.

He was assaulted by such intense pain that he seriously thought a part of his backbone had been dislocated, but he didn’t have time to cry out at every little thing. With the cold killer intent coming from above, Hamazura used all his strength to roll along the floor. Immediately afterwards, Mugino’s beams came down one after another.

“Run! Run!! Flee from your predator, little piggy!! Let me enjoy this as long as possible!!”

A fragment of the floor stabbed into his body. He didn’t know whether he had rolled on top of it or if it had been blown into him. Even so, he twisted his body and leapt for cover. She must have been pissed at having lost sight of her target because Mugino jumped down into the underground area shortly thereafter.

(…Where is this? Where’s the exit?)

Hiding behind cover, Hamazura looked around.

It was an odd area. The room was a 100 meters square, but protuberances were sticking out from one wall uniformly. And opposite the protuberances, what looked like air conditioner vents covered the wall. One wall was covered in reinforced glass and what looked like a control room could be seen through it.

They were in a fighter testing facility.

Which meant…

(Is this an air friction endurance testing area?)

Hamazura was leaning up against a capsule-shaped model. It was a full size model of a fighter cockpit. It may have been a model, but it had proper reinforced glass covering it and it was made of the same composite material as a real fighter.

It seemed to have been fixed in midair on something like a stepladder, but it had been knocked over by the explosive blast. The reinforced glass covering the cockpit was sitting half open.

“Haaamazuraaa.”

Hamazura Shiage’s shoulders gave a large jump at hearing his name called. He hurriedly searched for the exit and found it. However, it was a bit of a distance away. He would probably be shot 500 times before he reached the door if he ran out from behind the model cockpit.

He couldn’t use the exit.

He had to settle things there.

However, he doubted he could kill Mugino using only his handgun. She was the girl who had used her powers like a rocket engine to escape the detonation of a 200 kg bomb. A normal human could not hit her with a 9 mm bullet.

If he didn’t use some more powerful and overwhelming ranged attack that she could not escape, he could not defeat Mugino Shizuri. But Hamazura was a Level 0, not a powerful esper. He did not have something like that.

“God, this is really fucking ridiculous. It may be rather troublesome for you, but it’s even more so for me,” the Level 5 said as her footsteps approached. If she circled around, it was all over. “But at least I have it better than Kakine Teitoku. It seems that #2 was collected in an even worse state than me. His brain was split into three pieces and each one was stuck in a container full of some sticky liquid and a machine even larger than a refrigerator was installed on his side to

preserve only his crushed organs. It seems he's really nothing more than an object used to produce his Level 5 power."

Hamazura frantically looked around the area.

"It looks like the board chairman wants to reuse us pretty badly, but I wonder why. Well, the one thing I know for sure is that you're going to die here."

He was searching for a hint of how to turn the battle around. And then he found a single ray of hope.

"Hey, Hamazura."

And then…

"Why?"

He suddenly realized that Mugino's tone had changed. Hamazura thought for a second and then shook his head. He didn't want to think about that. If he did, he wouldn't be able to do what he had to do. He would hesitate in a situation where being even an instant too slow would be fatal.

But Mugino Shizuri continued speaking.

"…Why did I turn into such a horrible monster?"

(Dammit!!!!!)

Hamazura just barely managed to keep that curse silent.

That was what he had not wanted to think about. While Mugino Shizuri was a monster, she was also a girl. He didn't know what she specifically was referring to with "such a". It could have been her being kept alive by strange technology, it could have been her beginning to work in the underground organization of Item, and it even could have been her becoming a Level 5. At any rate, Hamazura Shiage did not have an answer to her question. All the question gave him was anguish.

Hamazura played with the small hint within his grasp and thought over it again.

Was it okay to kill her?

Could he just slay her as if she were a mere monster and then have a happy ending full of smiles?

“Is that what you wanted me to say, Haaamazuraaa?”

A grand noise rang out.

Mugino had circled around the model cockpit in an instant and kicked Hamazura squarely in the gut. That one attack was not the end of it. 7 or 8 of those sharp and heavy strikes sent deep pain to even Hamazura’s internal organs.

“Gya ha ha!! What are you twitching like that for!? Eh? Is that mouth of yours only there to cough up blood? At least use it to let me hear even rarer and more enjoyable screams!!”

“Gh…Geh! Gbh!?”

(…Dammit. What’s happened to my organs?)

The inside of his body was shaking unnaturally. His organs were acting oddly. They felt like a living thing wriggling around inside a leather bag. That was the first time Hamazura had ever known a human body to work like that.

(They’re still in their proper places, right? …They haven’t gotten all shuffled around, have they?)

“C’mon, enough with the silence. Maybe your senses’ll come back with a bit of kindness.”

Her toes struck his gut even harder than before.

Like he was being thrown into a trashcan, his body flew into the half-open cockpit. He heard a crackling noise. Mugino’s arm of light expanded to a size bigger than he had seen it before.

“I think I’ll mix you in with the melted iron so I’ll have an interesting piece of art once it cools.”

He had no time to think.

Hamazura pulled the trigger of his handgun. However, he did not hit Mugino. The bullets travelled on and shattered the reinforced glass on the wall. Mugino's smile turned even more villainous, but Hamazura's expression did not change. He had hit what he had been aiming for. He knew he would never hit her. The stream of bullets caused the heavy glass to shatter and pour into the control room. The glass rained down on the control panel. It hit buttons at random and sent instructions to the large installation.

A low roar began.

Mugino looked around questioningly and noticed the air conditioner vent like objects on the wall moving. Meanwhile, Hamazura slipped even deeper into the cockpit. It was only a model, so it had no real controls, but it did have one button. He pressed it and the half-open glass fully shut sealing the cockpit.

Mugino Shizuri realized something and finally turned back towards Hamazura.

She moved her lips, but Hamazura could not hear her through the reinforced glass.

But Mugino's eyes were wavering like those of a girl on the verge of tears.

Immediately afterwards, the area outside the cockpit became filled with an explosive orange wind.

The room they were inside was an air friction endurance testing area. When fighters travelled above the speed of sound, they received a huge amount of air friction. The surface temperature would reach a few hundred degrees. That facility was used to see if the craft could endure that friction. As they could not create air moving at the speed of sound, the room artificially created a special type of strong wind by using a large amount of iron sand to increase the friction like a file.

Hamazura was protected by the cockpit model.

Mugino did not have that protection.

A tremendous noise split the air as the 100 meter square room was filled with

explosive wind that created friction of a few hundred degrees. Mugino could move at high speed like a rocket engine, but she couldn't escape when the entire area was filled up like that. She was knocked back as if she had been hit by a giant fly swatter and she struck the other wall.

After that, Hamazura was unable to see what happened to her.

Everything outside of the transparent reinforced glass was dyed orange and he couldn't see anything. It was like looking outside the window on a space shuttle heading through the atmosphere.

Hamazura covered his face with his hands.

His victory did not bring him any joy.

He squeezed his eyes shut and prayed that that hell would disappear as quickly as possible. Had that really been his only option? He kept asking himself the same question.

Finally, the phenomenon came to an end.

Hamazura remained motionless for a bit, but he finally slowly rose up from the cockpit seat. He hit the button to open the reinforced glass and rolled out. The hot air struck his skin. It was like the inside of a heated oven.

What had happened to Mugino Shizuri?

He had no time to check.

"Hamazura. Hamazura!!" came a familiar girl's voice.

Hamazura looked up and saw Takitsubo through the crack in the ceiling created by the 200 kg bomb. Hamazura waved up at her to say he was fine.

He had chosen Takitsubo Rikou and had cast Mugino Shizuri aside.

Hamazura thought about that once more and then moved forward on his own legs once more.

That was when his cell phone rang. He answered it and heard Kinuhata Saiai's

voice.

“Hamazura!! Listen, you need to super get away from there as quickly as possible!!”

“Kinuhata…?”

“They’ve super figured out that you’re in the fighter testing facility in District 23! An Academy City unit is super headed there to capture you. If you’re captured by them, I super can’t guarantee you’ll survive!! Take Takitsubo-san and get away from there super fast!!”

“What?”

Hamazura frowned.

He could understand if they were sending a unit after Takitsubo or Kinuhata, but why were they going so far for a mere delinquent like him? He had been frightened out of his mind by Mugino’s appearance, but what had been with that unit that had been chasing him before?

At any rate, he had no time to think through it all then.

Hamazura ran over to the exit of the endurance testing area, ran up the stairs, and met up with Takitsubo.

“You said run away, but where to!? Even if it’s huge, Academy City is still a restricted area surrounded by a wall. If they just keep sending pursuers after us, we’ll be caught eventually!!”

“Don’t you have some kind of Skill-Out hideout or something!?”

“That would work if I was trying to hide from an enemy delinquent group, but I can’t hide anywhere that will permanently keep special forces from finding us!!”

He ran through a hangar like space while pulling on Takitsubo’s arm as he yelled into his phone. All the while, their pursuers were likely closing in on them. They would be killed at that rate.

And then Hamazura stopped running.

There was only one route through which they could definitely escape the Academy City pursuers.

“Hey, Kinuhata. The Academy City supersonic passenger planes have autopilot, right?”

“Hamazura, you don’t mean…”

“I know it won’t work for takeoff and landing, but we just have to get it flying in the first place! Hey, is there a manual or something!? We just have to get it in the air. We won’t think about the landing. We can just jump out with parachutes partway through and let it crash!!”

As he spoke, Hamazura looked straight forward.

A giant plane almost 80 meters long was stopped there along with the fighters. It was a supersonic passenger plane that could fly at over 7000 kph. To escape the Academy City special forces, they had to flee outside the city.

The plane required a special ramp vehicle to get aboard.

However, a connecting passageway had fallen down diagonally due to the 200 kg bomb. Hamazura and Takitsubo used it to get up right next to the plane’s side. Luckily, it wasn’t locked. They opened the hatch and climbed aboard.

“Hamazura, can you hear me? That underground hangar is made so planes can take off from it in case the fighters need to be super scrambled. Basically, it uses a super upwards sloping electromagnetic catapult.”

“What do we do? How do we escape into the sky!?”

“The catapult’s firing controls are super linked to the cockpit. If you activate the piloting computer, it seems you should be able to take off just by super touching the screen with your finger.”

He ran to the front of the plane where the cockpit was, opened the door, and entered the area with the stick and over 100 buttons. He started feeling dizzy, but he just pressed the buttons Kinuhata told him to as she seemed to be looking at the manual.

A number of screens lit up and a low roar started coming from the four giant engines. A diagram of the catapult was displayed on one of the monitors. He followed Kinuhata's instructions and moved his finger across the monitor and a few points turned from red to green.

The door to the underground hangar started to open and a group of men dressed in black appeared. When they saw that the supersonic passenger jet was about to takeoff, they immediately took action. They did not waste their ammunition. They brought a tractor around and stopped it in a place that would seal the catapult.

"Fuck!?" Hamazura yelled out, but he couldn't cancel the order to the catapult.

With a tremendous noise, the plane moved forward at high speed following the catapult's rails. Hamazura saw the man who had been driving the tractor hurriedly jump out as the supersonic passenger plane headed straight for it.

Just when Hamazura thought the plane was going to hit it, something he didn't expect happened.

A huge beam of light shot across and blew the tractor to the side. Before Hamazura could think about what that beam of light had been, the electromagnetic catapult shot the plane into the sloped tunnel leading to the surface. The passenger plane Hamazura and Takitsubo were aboard shot into the night sky as if it had been a paper airplane thrown by a giant hand.

Hamazura made sure not to touch the controls.

The autopilot program slowly leveled out the aircraft. As long as they didn't run into any turbulence, they should be fine.

(Mugino…)

That beam of light had most likely been her. He didn't know what she had fired that beam for, but he had a feeling he would meet her again somewhere.

"Hamazura…" Takitsubo muttered from his side.

Hamazura naturally embraced the girl around the shoulders. As if that action had cut the string of their tension, they both sat down on the cockpit floor.

The battle was over.

That one girl was in his arms.

Part 5

Accelerator lay on the bloody floor. He had lost a terrible amount of blood, but he oddly felt no pain. He couldn't move his arms or legs properly. However, he felt no fear. It was possible he didn't even have enough strength to spare for that.

(Is it…over…?)

He had bet his life on that strike. That final bullet had accurately pierced straight through the triangular prism-like object he had seen within Aiwass's semi-transparent head. That had been followed by the sound of a shattering crystal. He didn't really know what that had been, but he assumed it was Aiwass's weak point.

But…

"I guess that was so-so."

This time…This time true despair struck Accelerator. At some point, Aiwass had appeared standing before him. He didn't know when exactly the being had appeared. He didn't know how it had recovered, if he had even damaged it, or what that triangular prism was. The battle had gone on that long, but he still didn't have a single piece of solid information.

"If I were on the same level as Fuse Kazakiri, that would probably have taken me out. Even if it hadn't exactly killed me, it would have been a few years before I could have come out again. Aleister's plan would have needed major

revisions and you may have been able to rescue Last Order in that time.”

Aiwass was speaking in a carefree manner as if it did not particularly care if it lived on or died.

“However, it seems Aleister was a little more careful than I had thought in building up my security. He may worry too much. At any rate, my defenses seem to have been made much more solid than I had thought.”

“…God damn it…”

Accelerator desperately tried to stand up.

However, he had lost too much blood. He couldn’t move his arms and legs properly. As he struggled, Aiwass continued.

“It may not be particularly fair to you since you fought with everything you had, but…”

Aiwass smiled thinly.

A shining angel’s halo appeared above its head.

The halo was a palely shining platinum with a white core hidden within.

The blonde monster that appeared before people based on its curiosity that was based on subjective value then spoke its final words.

“It seems I can transform.”

An explosive noise rang out.

Accelerator’s consciousness was mercilessly blown away.

The final hope to protect a certain girl had fallen.

Epilogue: They Will Not Let It End a Tragedy.
Brave_in_Hand.

The blonde monster known as Aiwass walked on its own two legs while holding an ordinary cell phone to its ear.

It was on the end of the exposed framework of a building that was under construction. Aiwass looked up at the moon while walking along. It did not give a single glance down at its extremely narrow footing. Doing so had no value and the being had no interest in it. It had no more reason than that.

“Is it really that strange, Aleister?” Aiwass said calmly into the cell phone of unknown origin.

The person on the other end remained silent for a bit before responding.

“If you wanted to, you could move without using your legs. The same goes for a discussion of what I intend to do. It does baffle me. It simply isn’t efficient.”

“Standing on one’s own two legs and speaking through a tool of civilization has its own value. Although it may have a class to it that a man who floats upside down in a glass tube for efficiency’s sake simply cannot understand.”

Efficiency and value.

It seemed that was where the difference dividing those two monsters lay.

“Oh, right. About the #1 you have finally succeeded in bringing about after spending more than 50 years creating this eccentric city…”

“Is this about him not having proceeded as you expected?”

“Well, you can still make that fit within the acceptable margin of error, right?

But his mentality is much more juvenile than I had expected. He despises himself as evil, but I wonder if he realizes that is just the reverse side of his intense longing for good. …And yet the Imagine Breaker that the #1 is chasing after does not take action because he associates himself with either good or evil. That Imagine Breaker is merely acting according to the spirit that is welling up from within him. It is merely that what he does looks like good from the viewpoint of others."

As Aiwass stared up at the moon, a thin, thin smile appeared on its face. The expression seemed to say that a brief conversation held more value and interest to it than the destruction of the world.

"By any chance, do you admire the two of them?" asked the being.

"…"

"There are many different types of heroes. …There are those who aren't told what to do and just move straight ahead following the feelings welling up within. …There are those who committed a major sin in the past and try to walk down the right path due to the anguish that sin brings them. …And there are those who were chosen by no one and possess none of the characteristics one would expect of a hero, and yet become a hero for that one person they care for. Each of those types is the type of person who will always stand back up when knocked to the ground."

"…Aiwass."

"It seems all three of those types of heroes possess something you do not. As such, it isn't surprising that you admire them. …After all, *at that time*, you were only able to fall and lament."

"*Aiwass*," Aleister said once more.

For just an instant, a slight distortion entered that human voice that sounded like the voice of both a man and a woman, both of an adult and a child, and both of a saint and a criminal. It was not quite like any normal human emotion.

Aiwass's expression did not change.

Perhaps Aiwass saw no value that made it worth showing interest in that.

“I will use anything I can. That includes you. You may find it amusing that there are slight errors in my plan, but let me tell you something. …There is no guarantee that your absolute superiority will last forever.”

“I do not possess this power because I wished for it, nor do I continue to hold it because I work towards that end,” said Aiwass into the cell phone. “But fine. I suppose I shall appear here again when something else holds value and interest to me.”

Yomikawa Aiho woke up at a time before dawn, but she herself was not quite sure why. She was a skilled member of Anti-Skill and her training allowed her to accurately detect someone’s presence. She left her bedroom without turning on the lights and saw the apartment’s living room window sitting unnaturally open.

She cautiously checked around the room and learned two things. First, Last Order, the girl living with her, was gone. Second, a trail of blood led from the living room window to the girl’s room.

Yomikawa’s expression changed, but then she found something else.

It was a small note.

The shaky characters making up the short note were written in red blood. It wasn’t signed, but Yomikawa immediately had a good idea who it had been. She didn’t know exactly what was meant by the note, but this is what it said: *"I’ll show you that I can save this kid’s life."*

Periodic vibrations shook Accelerator. The dark area he was in was a container on a freight train. The freight train was running before the first train of the day and it was headed outside of Academy City. Its cargo would be checked at the outer wall, but Accelerator knew a process to slip past it due to his knowledge working in the dark side of the city.

There were no voices.

The area was oddly silent for an area that had two people in it quietly breathing.

Accelerator was crouched down unmoving while holding a small girl in his arms. Last Order was completely unconscious and lying limply in his arms. Aiwass's appearance must have been quite a burden for her because the small girl was more exhausted than he had ever seen her.

"That girl is a difficult case."

Accelerator recalled the words that had been spoken to him after he had been completely defeated.

"It depends on Aleister's plan, but she will certainly break down eventually whether it is very soon or in the distant future. The process by which my existence had been put into the plan will kill her. Stop relying on that doctor. To be blunt, he is still human. His skills are not perfect and if there is a way of saving her with the technology of this city, Aleister will have his eye on it. Of course, destroying his plan by taking this body from me is just one of many possibilities. If you do not want to grieve later, then walk along a path different from the one that you are on now."

What had the being meant by that?

Aiwass must have seen some kind of value and interest in speaking because it continued doing so.

"Go to Russia."

Accelerator had silently listened.

The fact that Aiwass was not an opponent he could cut to pieces by simply relying on his anger created such anger within him that he felt like his neurons were burning.

"Specifically, head to the Elizalina Alliance of Independent Nations. That area is currently transforming into the center of a planet-wide war. All kinds of knowledge and technologies of civilization will gather together having been tempered by the military and by weaponry. …And a *completely different set of laws* that you have never seen before will be there, too."

Aiwass had merely continued speaking without paying any heed to the hearts of others.

“Remember the term Index Librorum Prohibitorum. That itself is not actually there, but an important item dealing with it is.”

“...”

Evil had not had any effect in the face of that overwhelming power.

What was he going to do now? He felt like he had headed out into the wilderness using a GPS map, but the screen had suddenly disappeared. He didn’t know where to go.

He was Academy City’s strongest monster. No one could see him while he hid within the freight train, but everyone probably would have gotten a similar impression from him if they could.

He looked like a child who had been cast out by his parents and was now crouching down in exhaustion after having walked throughout the large city.

A crunching sound could be heard.

It was the sound of him crushing his cell phone in his fist. His only line to Group, Yomikawa Aiho, and Yoshikawa Kikyou was now gone.

Accelerator embraced the young girl in his arms again and his lips moved ever so slightly. He muttered a few words without making much audible noise if any.

“Then we’ll go to Russia.”

The supersonic passenger plane Hamazura Shiage and Takitsubo Rikou were onboard continued to fly through the sky using the autopilot that merely kept the plane stabilized and heading forward. However, that could not go on forever. Hamazura did not possess the skills needed to safely land the large aircraft.

(…We have no choice but to jump out partway with parachutes.)

As he thought, Hamazura set up explosives around the plane. The plane had been in the fighter testing facility. It used Academy City’s cutting edge technology. He couldn’t let some other country get their hands on it and he

didn’t want to just let the giant mass crash either. Blowing it up over the ocean or over some wilderness would be best.

After setting up all the explosives, he headed for the passenger area instead of the cockpit. Takitsubo was sitting limply there leaning up against the wall.

“It’s all set up. Is this really okay?”

“…Yes. This plane has a security package that melts all the primary circuits with a powerful acid when it crashes in order to conceal the technology used. There is almost no risk of having another country use its classified information to make a weapon this way…”

Her voice sounded very dull.

Hamazura was no scientist so he had no idea how much the Body Crystal had eaten into her body. However, he knew it was not something that she would just get over. He was also pretty sure that the medical technology outside the city wouldn’t be able to do anything about it.

In the end, Takitsubo could not live without using Academy City technology.

(Just getting away from Academy City is not a victory. Not even utterly destroying the science side is.)

Hamazura Shiage made up his mind all on his own.

(The best situation would be to have Academy City surrender. I know I have no chance of ever doing that, so I need to focus on losing in the best way possible.)

At the very least, he needed to negotiate for Takitsubo’s safety.

Just like the supersonic passenger plane had enough information within it that an acid had to be used to destroy it, a Level 4 like Takitsubo or her DNA map was full of information that another country could not allowed to get their hands on. He would negotiate with Academy City using that. That was the only way for her to survive.

He would make sure that happened even if it meant losing all of his bargaining materials merely guaranteeing her safety.

“??? Hamazura, what is it?”

“Nothing.”

Hamazura forced a smile and then stuck an explosive on the door connecting the passenger area to the outside. To make sure she wasn’t caught up in the blast, he picked up Takitsubo’s limp form to take her away from the area.

As he did, Takitsubo wrapped her arms around his neck.

She brought her face in and their lips touched.

It only lasted a few seconds, but it was enough to smash Hamazura’s pessimistic plan to pieces.

“Don’t leave me,” Takitsubo said.

Hamazura somehow knew just how much meaning was held in those words.

“I know…”

He tightened his embrace on the girl and spoke with trembling lips.

Whatever happened, both of them would live on.

“Like hell I’ll leave you. Dammit, I never will. I’ll never leave you!!”

Hearing those reckless words, a slight smile appeared on Takitsubo’s face.

The speed of the supersonic passenger plane dropped. Hamazura didn’t really understand, but it seemed Takitsubo had messed with the settings of the autopilot while he had been setting up the explosives. She couldn’t properly fly a plane either, but it seemed she could at least read the manual and alter the settings slightly.

“I wonder where we are.”

“If the GPS information is right, we’re in Russia. I think we’re near a place called the Elizalina Alliance of Independent Nations. There are no civilian facilities here, so there shouldn’t be any damage from the explosion.”

“I see,” responded Hamazura.

Wherever they were, he would continue to run away and use everything he could to ensure Takitsubo’s safety and to bring the two of them happiness. As Hamazura gained that new resolve, he activated the remote detonator for the explosive on the passenger area door.

The door was blown away in an instant.

The difference in air pressure caused a strong wind that blew them outside the plane like air escaping a balloon. They both had parachutes on their backs and they held hands as they fell like people skydiving for sport.

The two of them dove down towards a new battlefield in order to grab hope with their own hands.

And a certain spiky haired boy was also heading to Russia.

The fight against the Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church had reached its climax. The girl who had 103,000 grimoires memorized was in danger. In order to save her, the boy had to quickly defeat Fiamma of the Right, the man pulling all the strings within Russia.

“Wait for me,” the boy muttered.

His feet unhesitatingly took him towards a worldwide conflict so that he could save a certain girl.

They would not let it end in tragedy.

A number of protagonists gathered in one place holding various feelings within themselves.

At that time, the different paths on which they walked intersected.

The true story was beginning with the world’s most harsh battlefield as a stage.

Afterword

To those who have continued reading from Volume 1: welcome back.

To those who bought the 21 books all at once: thank you very much.

This is Kamachi Kazuma.

As explained at the start, this story is closely related to Volume 15. This volume is full of science terms and the suggestive term Dragon that appeared at the end of 15 is central to this volume's story.

Aiwass mentioned it at the end, but there are many different types of heroes. There is Accelerator who is a villain who wishes for good more than anyone else and there is Hamazura Shiage who crept up to being a hero from his position as the dime-a-dozen small fry type of character who is clearly just going to get killed. They are different types of heroes than Kamijou Touma, so I couldn't help but enjoy having them appear so suddenly. …They so effectively stir things up because the main storyline is Kamijou Touma's story. Just think of this part as the story of a villain and a thug for contrast.

With the previous appearances of Shirai Kuroko and Acqua of the Back, it seems I just love characters that risk their lives to protect something that is important to them. The subtitle for the epilogue was originally going to be Hope_in_Hand, but I decided that Brave fit the protagonists much better.

My thanks go out to my illustrator Haimura-san, my editors Miki-san and Fujiwara-san, and Iwakura-san who helped with the design of the powered suits. I feel like the unique feel of the villain side that Accelerator and Hamazura Shiage are involved in came out much better in the illustrations than it did in the text itself. I am truly grateful for all their help this time as well.

And I give my thanks to the readers as well. It's thanks to your support and

acceptance of my way of doing things that I have been able to continue this irregular series where the feel of each volume can change so drastically. There are a lot of things I want to try from here on out, so please keep reading.

Now it is time to close the pages for now while praying that the pages of the next book will be opened.

And I lay my pen down for now.

What kind of battle will unfold for those protagonists who have taken bravery into their hands?

-Kamachi Kazuma

Toaru Majutsu no Index — Volume 19

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Illustrator: **Haimura Kiyotaka**

Translated by **Flere821** & **Js06**

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Prologue  - Flere821 — Completed
Chapter 1 - Parts 1,3,5-9 - Flere821;
            The Rest - Js06 — Completed
Chapter 2 - Js06 — Completed
Chapter 3 - Parts 1,2,5-8,10,11,13 - Flere821;
            The Rest - Js06 — Completed
Chapter 4 - Js06 — Completed
Epilogue  - Js06 — Completed
Afterword - Js06 — Completed
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